

**Code of Professional Conduct
for British Columbia
(the BC Code)**

**Published under the authority of the Benchers
for the guidance of BC lawyers**

**The rules in this Code should guide the conduct of lawyers,
not only in the practice of law, but also in other activities.**

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Interpretation and Definitions

1.1 Definitions	1
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Chapter 2 – Standards of the Legal Profession

2.1 Canons of Legal Ethics	
To the state	3
To courts and tribunals	3
To the client	4
To other lawyers	5
To oneself	6
2.2 Integrity	6

Chapter 3 – Relationship to Clients

3.1 Competence	
Definitions	9
Competence	10
3.2 Quality of service	
Quality of service	12
Limited scope retainers	14
Honesty and candour	14.1
When the client is an organization	14.1
Encouraging compromise or settlement	15
Threatening criminal or regulatory proceedings	15
Inducement for withdrawal of criminal or regulatory proceedings	15
Dishonesty, fraud by client	16
Dishonesty, fraud when client an organization	17
Clients with diminished capacity	19
Restricting future representation	20
3.3 Confidentiality	
Confidential information	20
Use of confidential information	22
Lawyers’ obligation to claim privilege when faced with requirement to surrender document	23
Future harm / public safety exception	23

Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia

3.4 Conflicts	
Duty to avoid conflicts of interest	25
Consent	28
Dispute	30
Concurrent representation with protection of confidential client information	30
Joint retainers	31
Acting against former clients	34
Limited representation	34
Conflicts from transfer between law firms	35
Application of rule	35
Law firm disqualification	36
Continued representation not to involve transferring lawyer	37
Determination of compliance	37
Due diligence	38
Conflicts with clients	38
Doing business with a client	39
Independent legal advice	39
Investment by client when lawyer has an interest	40
Borrowing from clients	41
Certificate of independent legal advice	41
Lawyers in loan or mortgage transactions	42
Guarantees by a lawyer	42
Testamentary instruments and gifts	42
Judicial interim release	42
Space-sharing arrangements	43
3.5 Preservation of clients' property	
Preservation of clients' property	43
Notification of receipt of property	44
Identifying clients' property	44
Accounting and delivery	44
3.6 Fees and disbursements	
Reasonable fees and disbursements	44
Contingent fees and contingent fee agreements	46
Statement of account	46
Joint retainer	47
Division of fees and referral fees	47
Exception for multi-disciplinary practices	48
Payment and appropriation of funds	49
Prepaid legal services plan	49

Table of Contents

3.7 Withdrawal from representation	
Withdrawal from representation	49
Optional withdrawal	51
Non-payment of fees	51
Withdrawal from criminal proceedings	52
Obligatory withdrawal	53
Manner of withdrawal	53
Confidentiality	54
Duty of successor lawyer	55
Chapter 4 – Marketing of Legal Services	
4.2 Marketing	
Application of rule	57
Definitions	57
Content and format of marketing activities	57
Notary public	58
Designation	58
4.3 Advertising nature of practice	
Preferred areas of practice	58
Specialization	59
Real estate sales	59
Multi-disciplinary practice	59
Chapter 5 – Relationship to the Administration of Justice	
5.1 The lawyer as advocate	
Advocacy	61
Duty as prosecutor	64
Disclosure of error or omission	64
Courtesy	65
Undertakings	65
Agreement on guilty plea	65
5.2 The lawyer as witness	
Submission of evidence	66
Appeals	66
5.3 Interviewing witnesses	
Interviewing witnesses	67

Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia

5.4 Communication with witnesses giving evidence	
Communication with witnesses giving evidence	67
5.5 Relations with jurors	
Communications before trial	68
Disclosure of information	69
Communication during trial	69
5.6 The lawyer and the administration of justice	
Encouraging respect for the administration of justice	69
Seeking legislative or administrative changes	70
Security of court facilities	71
5.7 Lawyers and mediators	
Role of mediator	71
Chapter 6 – Relationship to Students, Employees, and Others	
6.1 Supervision	
Direct supervision required	73
Definitions	73
Delegation	74
Suspended or disbarred lawyers	76
Electronic registration of documents	76.1
Real estate assistants	77
6.2 Students	
Recruitment and engagement procedures	78
Duties of principal	78
Duties of articulated student	78
6.3 Harassment and discrimination	78
Chapter 7 – Relationship to the Society and Other Lawyers	
7.1 Responsibility to the society and the profession generally	
Regulatory compliance	81
Meeting financial obligations	81
Duty to report	82
Encouraging client to report dishonest conduct	83
7.2 Responsibility to lawyers and others	
Courtesy and good faith	83
Communications	84
Inadvertent communications	86

Table of Contents

Undertakings and trust conditions	86
Trust cheques	87
Real estate transactions	88
7.3 Outside interests and the practice of law	
Maintaining professional integrity and judgment	88
7.4 The lawyer in public office	
Standard of conduct	89
7.5 Public appearances and public statements	
Communication with the public	90
Interference with right to fair trial or hearing	91
7.6 Preventing unauthorized practice.....	91
7.7 Retired judges returning to practice	91
7.8 Errors and omissions	
Informing client of errors or omission	92
Notice of claim	92
Co-operation	93
Responding to client's claim	93
Appendix A – Affidavits, Solemn Declarations and Officer Certifications	
Affidavits and solemn declarations	95
Witnessing the execution of an instrument	99
Appendix B – Family Law Mediation	
Definitions	101
Disqualifications	102
Obligations of family law mediator or arbitrator or parenting coordinator when participants unrepresented	102
Obligations of family law mediator or parenting coordinator	102.1
Obligations of family law arbitrator	102.1
Lawyer with dual role	102.2
Appendix C – Real Property Transactions	
Application	103
Acting for parties with different interests	103
Simple conveyance	103
Advice and consent	105
Foreclosure proceedings	105
Unrepresented parties in a real property transaction	106

Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia

Appendix D – Conflicts Arising as a Result of Transfer Between Law Firms

Matters to consider when interviewing a potential transferee	107
Matters to consider before hiring a potential transferee	108
If a conflict does exist	108
If no conflict exists	108
If the new law firm is not sure whether a conflict exists	109
Reasonable measures to ensure non-disclosure of confidential information	109
Guidelines	110

Appendix E – Supervision of Paralegals

Key concepts	113
Best practices for supervising paralegals:	113
Best practices for training paralegals	114
A checklist for assessing the competence of paralegals	114
Screening for family violence	115
Designated paralegals giving legal advice	116

Chapter 1 – Interpretation and Definitions

1.1 Definitions

1.1-1 In this Code, unless the context indicates otherwise,

“associate” includes:

- (a) a lawyer who practises law in a law firm through an employment or other contractual relationship; and
- (b) a non-lawyer employee of a multi-discipline practice providing services that support or supplement the practice of law;

“client” means a person who:

- (a) consults a lawyer and on whose behalf the lawyer renders or agrees to render legal services; or
- (b) having consulted the lawyer, reasonably concludes that the lawyer has agreed to render legal services on his or her behalf.

Commentary

[1] A lawyer-client relationship may be established without formality.

[2] When an individual consults a lawyer in a representative capacity, the client is the corporation, partnership, organization, or other legal entity that the individual is representing;

[3] For greater clarity, a client does not include a near-client, such as an affiliated entity, director, shareholder, employee or family member, unless there is objective evidence to demonstrate that such an individual had a reasonable expectation that a lawyer-client relationship would be established.

“conflict of interest” means the existence of a substantial risk that a lawyer’s loyalty to or representation of a client would be materially and adversely affected by the lawyer’s own interest or the lawyer’s duties to another client, a former client, or a third person.

“consent” means fully informed and voluntary consent after disclosure

- (a) in writing, provided that, if more than one person consents, each signs the same or a separate document recording the consent; or
- (b) orally, provided that each person consenting receives a separate written communication recording the consent as soon as practicable;

Chapter 2 – Standards of the Legal Profession

2.1 Canons of Legal Ethics

These Canons of Legal Ethics in rules 2.1-1 to 2.1-5 are a general guide and not a denial of the existence of other duties equally imperative and of other rights, though not specifically mentioned. A version of these Canons has formed part of the *Code of Professional Conduct* of the Law Society of British Columbia since 1921. They are included here both for their historical value and for their statement of general principles that underlie the remainder of the rules in this Code.

A lawyer is a minister of justice, an officer of the courts, a client's advocate and a member of an ancient, honourable and learned profession.

In these several capacities, it is a lawyer's duty to promote the interests of the state, serve the cause of justice, maintain the authority and dignity of the courts, be faithful to clients, be candid and courteous in relations with other lawyers and demonstrate personal integrity.

2.1-1 To the state

- (a) A lawyer owes a duty to the state, to maintain its integrity and its law. A lawyer should not aid, counsel or assist any person to act in any way contrary to the law.
- (b) When engaged as a Crown prosecutor, a lawyer's primary duty is not to seek a conviction but to see that justice is done; to that end the lawyer should make timely disclosure to the defence of all facts and known witnesses whether tending to show guilt or innocence, or that would affect the punishment of the accused.
- (c) A lawyer should accept without hesitation, and if need be without fee or reward, the cause of any person assigned to the lawyer by the court, and exert every effort on behalf of that person.

2.1-2 To courts and tribunals

- (a) A lawyer's conduct should at all times be characterized by candour and fairness. The lawyer should maintain toward a court or tribunal a courteous and respectful attitude and insist on similar conduct on the part of clients, at the same time discharging professional duties to clients resolutely and with self-respecting independence.
- (b) Judges, not being free to defend themselves, are entitled to receive the support of the legal profession against unjust criticism and complaint. Whenever there is proper ground for serious complaint against a judicial officer, it is proper for a lawyer to submit the grievance to the appropriate authorities.

Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia

- (c) A lawyer should not attempt to deceive a court or tribunal by offering false evidence or by misstating facts or law and should not, either in argument to the judge or in address to the jury, assert a personal belief in an accused's guilt or innocence, in the justice or merits of the client's cause or in the evidence tendered before the court.
- (d) A lawyer should never seek privately to influence a court or tribunal, directly or indirectly, in the lawyer's or a client's favour, nor should the lawyer attempt to curry favour with juries by fawning, flattery or pretended solicitude for their personal comfort.

2.1-3 To the client

- (a) A lawyer should obtain sufficient knowledge of the relevant facts and give adequate consideration to the applicable law before advising a client, and give an open and undisguised opinion of the merits and probable results of the client's cause. The lawyer should be wary of bold and confident assurances to the client, especially where the lawyer's employment may depend on such assurances. The lawyer should bear in mind that seldom are all the law and facts on the client's side, and that *audi alteram partem* (hear the other side) is a safe rule to follow.
- (b) A lawyer should disclose to the client all the circumstances of the lawyer's relations to the parties and interest in or connection with the controversy, if any, that might influence whether the client selects or continues to retain the lawyer. A lawyer must not act where there is a conflict of interests between the lawyer and a client or between clients.
- (c) Whenever the dispute will admit of fair settlement the client should be advised to avoid or to end the litigation.
- (d) A lawyer should treat adverse witnesses, litigants and counsel with fairness and courtesy, refraining from all offensive personalities. The lawyer must not allow a client's personal feelings and prejudices to detract from the lawyer's professional duties. At the same time, the lawyer should represent the client's interests resolutely and without fear of judicial disfavour or public unpopularity.
- (e) A lawyer should endeavour by all fair and honourable means to obtain for a client the benefit of any and every remedy and defence that is authorized by law. The lawyer must, however, steadfastly bear in mind that this great trust is to be performed within and not without the bounds of the law. The office of the lawyer does not permit, much less demand, for any client, violation of law or any manner of fraud or chicanery. No client has a right to demand that the lawyer be illiberal or do anything repugnant to the lawyer's own sense of honour and propriety.

Chapter 2 – Standards of the Legal Profession

- (f) It is a lawyer's right to undertake the defence of a person accused of crime, regardless of the lawyer's own personal opinion as to the guilt of the accused. Having undertaken such defence, the lawyer is bound to present, by all fair and honourable means and in a manner consistent with the client's instructions, every defence that the law of the land permits, to the end that no person will be convicted except by due process of law.
- (g) A lawyer should not, except as by law expressly sanctioned, acquire by purchase or otherwise any interest in the subject-matter of the litigation being conducted by the lawyer. A lawyer should scrupulously guard, and not divulge or use for personal benefit, a client's secrets or confidences. Having once acted for a client in a matter, a lawyer must not act against the client in the same or any related matter.
- (h) A lawyer must record, and should report promptly to a client the receipt of any moneys or other trust property. The lawyer must use the client's moneys and trust property only as authorized by the client, and not commingle it with that of the lawyer.
- (i) A lawyer is entitled to reasonable compensation for services rendered, but should avoid charges that are unreasonably high or low. The client's ability to pay cannot justify a charge in excess of the value of the service, though it may require a reduction or waiver of the fee.
- (j) A lawyer should try to avoid controversies with clients regarding compensation so far as is compatible with self-respect and with the right to receive reasonable recompense for services. A lawyer should always bear in mind that the profession is a branch of the administration of justice and not a mere money-making business.
- (k) A lawyer who appears as an advocate should not submit the lawyer's own affidavit to or testify before a court or tribunal except as to purely formal or uncontroverted matters, such as the attestation or custody of a document, unless it is necessary in the interests of justice. If the lawyer is a necessary witness with respect to other matters, the conduct of the case should be entrusted to other counsel.

2.1-4 To other lawyers

- (a) A lawyer's conduct toward other lawyers should be characterized by courtesy and good faith. Any ill feeling that may exist between clients or lawyers, particularly during litigation, should never be allowed to influence lawyers in their conduct and demeanour toward each other or the parties. Personal remarks or references between lawyers should be scrupulously avoided, as should quarrels between lawyers that cause delay and promote unseemly wrangling.
- (b) A lawyer should neither give nor request an undertaking that cannot be fulfilled and should fulfil every undertaking given. A lawyer should never communicate upon or attempt to negotiate or compromise a matter directly with any party who the lawyer knows is represented therein by another lawyer, except through or with the consent of that other lawyer.

Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia

- (c) A lawyer should avoid all sharp practice and should take no paltry advantage when an opponent has made a slip or overlooked some technical matter. A lawyer should accede to reasonable requests that do not prejudice the rights of the client or the interests of justice.

2.1-5 To oneself

- (a) A lawyer should assist in maintaining the honour and integrity of the legal profession, should expose before the proper tribunals without fear or favour, unprofessional or dishonest conduct by any other lawyer and should accept without hesitation a retainer against any lawyer who is alleged to have wronged the client.
- (b) It is the duty of every lawyer to guard the Bar against the admission to the profession of any candidate whose moral character or education renders that person unfit for admission.
- (c) A lawyer should make legal services available to the public in an efficient and convenient manner that will command respect and confidence. A lawyer's best advertisement is the establishment of a well-merited reputation for competence and trustworthiness.
- (d) No client is entitled to receive, nor should any lawyer render any service or advice involving disloyalty to the state or disrespect for judicial office, or the corruption of any persons exercising a public or private trust, or deception or betrayal of the public.
- (e) A lawyer should recognize that the oaths taken upon admission to the Bar are solemn undertakings to be strictly observed.
- (f) All lawyers should bear in mind that they can maintain the high traditions of the profession by steadfastly adhering to the time-honoured virtues of probity, integrity, honesty and dignity.

2.2 Integrity

2.2-1 A lawyer has a duty to carry on the practice of law and discharge all responsibilities to clients, tribunals, the public and other members of the profession honourably and with integrity.

Commentary

[1] Integrity is the fundamental quality of any person who seeks to practise as a member of the legal profession. If a client has any doubt about his or her lawyer's trustworthiness, the essential element in the true lawyer-client relationship will be missing. If integrity is lacking, the lawyer's usefulness to the client and reputation within the profession will be destroyed, regardless of how competent the lawyer may be.

Chapter 5 - Relationship to the Administration of Justice

5.1 The lawyer as advocate

Advocacy

5.1-1 When acting as an advocate, a lawyer must represent the client resolutely and honourably within the limits of the law, while treating the tribunal with candour, fairness, courtesy, and respect.

Commentary

[1] Role in adversarial proceedings – In adversarial proceedings, the lawyer has a duty to the client to raise fearlessly every issue, advance every argument and ask every question, however distasteful, that the lawyer thinks will help the client’s case and to endeavour to obtain for the client the benefit of every remedy and defence authorized by law. The lawyer must discharge this duty by fair and honourable means, without illegality and in a manner that is consistent with the lawyer’s duty to treat the tribunal with candour, fairness, courtesy and respect and in a way that promotes the parties’ right to a fair hearing in which justice can be done. Maintaining dignity, decorum and courtesy in the courtroom is not an empty formality because, unless order is maintained, rights cannot be protected.

[2] This rule applies to the lawyer as advocate, and therefore extends not only to court proceedings but also to appearances and proceedings before boards, administrative tribunals, arbitrators, mediators and others who resolve disputes, regardless of their function or the informality of their procedures.

[3] The lawyer’s function as advocate is openly and necessarily partisan. Accordingly, the lawyer is not obliged (except as required by law or under these rules and subject to the duties of a prosecutor set out below) to assist an adversary or advance matters harmful to the client’s case.

[4] In adversarial proceedings that will likely affect the health, welfare or security of a child, a lawyer should advise the client to take into account the best interests of the child, if this can be done without prejudicing the legitimate interests of the client.

[5] A lawyer should refrain from expressing the lawyer's personal opinions on the merits of a client's case to a court or tribunal.

[6] When opposing interests are not represented, for example, in without notice or uncontested matters or in other situations in which the full proof and argument inherent in the adversarial system cannot be achieved, the lawyer must take particular care to be accurate, candid and comprehensive in presenting the client’s case so as to ensure that the tribunal is not misled.

Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia

[7] The lawyer should never waive or abandon the client's legal rights, such as an available defence under a statute of limitations, without the client's informed consent.

[8] In civil proceedings, a lawyer should avoid and discourage the client from resorting to frivolous or vexatious objections, attempts to gain advantage from slips or oversights not going to the merits or tactics that will merely delay or harass the other side. Such practices can readily bring the administration of justice and the legal profession into disrepute.

[9] **Duty as defence counsel** – When defending an accused person, a lawyer's duty is to protect the client as far as possible from being convicted, except by a tribunal of competent jurisdiction and upon legal evidence sufficient to support a conviction for the offence with which the client is charged. Accordingly, and notwithstanding the lawyer's private opinion on credibility or the merits, a lawyer may properly rely on any evidence or defences, including so-called technicalities, not known to be false or fraudulent.

[10] Admissions made by the accused to a lawyer may impose strict limitations on the conduct of the defence, and the accused should be made aware of this. For example, if the accused clearly admits to the lawyer the factual and mental elements necessary to constitute the offence, the lawyer, if convinced that the admissions are true and voluntary, may properly take objection to the jurisdiction of the court, the form of the indictment or the admissibility or sufficiency of the evidence, but must not suggest that some other person committed the offence or call any evidence that, by reason of the admissions, the lawyer believes to be false. Nor may the lawyer set up an affirmative case inconsistent with such admissions, for example, by calling evidence in support of an alibi intended to show that the accused could not have done or, in fact, has not done the act. Such admissions will also impose a limit on the extent to which the lawyer may attack the evidence for the prosecution. The lawyer is entitled to test the evidence given by each individual witness for the prosecution and argue that the evidence taken as a whole is insufficient to amount to proof that the accused is guilty of the offence charged, but the lawyer should go no further than that.

5.1-2 When acting as an advocate, a lawyer must not:

- (a) abuse the process of the tribunal by instituting or prosecuting proceedings that, although legal in themselves, are clearly motivated by malice on the part of the client and are brought solely for the purpose of injuring the other party;
- (b) knowingly assist or permit a client to do anything that the lawyer considers to be dishonest or dishonourable;
- (c) appear before a judicial officer when the lawyer, the lawyer's associates or the client have business or personal relationships with the officer that give rise to or might reasonably appear to give rise to pressure, influence or inducement affecting the impartiality of the officer, unless all parties consent and it is in the interests of justice;

Chapter 5 – Relationship to the Administration of Justice

- (d) endeavour or allow anyone else to endeavour, directly or indirectly, to influence the decision or action of a tribunal or any of its officials in any case or matter by any means other than open persuasion as an advocate;
- (e) knowingly attempt to deceive a tribunal or influence the course of justice by offering false evidence, misstating facts or law, presenting or relying upon a false or deceptive affidavit, suppressing what ought to be disclosed or otherwise assisting in any fraud, crime or illegal conduct;
- (f) knowingly misstate the contents of a document, the testimony of a witness, the substance of an argument or the provisions of a statute or like authority;
- (g) knowingly assert as fact that which cannot reasonably be supported by the evidence or taken on judicial notice by the tribunal;
- (h) make suggestions to a witness recklessly or knowing them to be false;
- (i) deliberately refrain from informing a tribunal of any binding authority that the lawyer considers to be directly on point and that has not been mentioned by another party;
- (j) improperly dissuade a witness from giving evidence or advise a witness to be absent;
- (k) knowingly permit a witness or party to be presented in a false or misleading way or to impersonate another;
- (l) knowingly misrepresent the client's position in the litigation or the issues to be determined in the litigation
- (m) abuse, hector or harass a witness;
- (n) when representing a complainant or potential complainant, attempt to gain a benefit for the complainant by threatening the laying of a criminal charge or by offering to seek or to procure the withdrawal of a criminal charge;
- (o) needlessly inconvenience a witness; or
- (p) appear before a tribunal while under the influence of alcohol or a drug.

Commentary

[1] In civil proceedings, a lawyer has a duty not to mislead the tribunal about the position of the client in the adversarial process. Thus, a lawyer representing a party to litigation who has made or is party to an agreement made before or during the trial by which a plaintiff is guaranteed recovery by one or more parties, notwithstanding the judgment of the court, should immediately reveal the existence and particulars of the agreement to the court and to all parties to the proceedings.

Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia

[2] A lawyer representing an accused or potential accused may communicate with a complainant or potential complainant, for example, to obtain factual information, to arrange for restitution or an apology from the accused, or to defend or settle any civil claims between the accused and the complainant. However, when the complainant or potential complaint is vulnerable, the lawyer must take care not to take unfair or improper advantage of the circumstances. If the complainant or potential complainant is unrepresented, the lawyer should be governed by the rules about unrepresented persons and make it clear that the lawyer is acting exclusively in the interests of the accused or potential accused. When communicating with an unrepresented complainant or potential complainant, it is prudent to have a witness present.

[3] It is an abuse of the court's process to threaten to bring an action or to offer to seek withdrawal of a criminal charge in order to gain a benefit. See also rules 3.2-5 and 3.2-6 and accompanying commentary.

[4] When examining a witness, a lawyer may pursue any hypothesis that is honestly advanced on the strength of reasonable inference, experience or intuition.

Duty as prosecutor

5.1-3 When acting as a prosecutor, a lawyer must act for the public and the administration of justice resolutely and honourably within the limits of the law while treating the tribunal with candour, fairness, courtesy and respect.

Commentary

[1] When engaged as a prosecutor, the lawyer's primary duty is not to seek to convict but to see that justice is done through a fair trial on the merits. The prosecutor exercises a public function involving much discretion and power and must act fairly and dispassionately. The prosecutor should not do anything that might prevent the accused from being represented by counsel or communicating with counsel and, to the extent required by law and accepted practice, should make timely disclosure to defence counsel or directly to an unrepresented accused of all relevant and known facts and witnesses, whether tending to show guilt or innocence.

Disclosure of error or omission

5.1-4 A lawyer who has unknowingly done or failed to do something that, if done or omitted knowingly, would have been in breach of this rule and who discovers it, must, subject to section 3.3 (Confidentiality), disclose the error or omission and do all that can reasonably be done in the circumstances to rectify it.

Chapter 5 – Relationship to the Administration of Justice

Commentary

[1] If a client desires that a course be taken that would involve a breach of this rule, the lawyer must refuse and do everything reasonably possible to prevent it. If that cannot be done, the lawyer should, subject to rule 3.7-1 (Withdrawal from Representation), withdraw or seek leave to do so.

Courtesy

5.1-5 A lawyer must be courteous and civil and act in good faith to the tribunal and all persons with whom the lawyer has dealings.

Commentary

[1] Legal contempt of court and the professional obligation outlined here are not identical, and a consistent pattern of rude, provocative or disruptive conduct by a lawyer, even though unpunished as contempt, may constitute professional misconduct.

Undertakings

5.1-6 A lawyer must strictly and scrupulously fulfill any undertakings given and honour any trust conditions accepted in the course of litigation.

Commentary

[1] A lawyer should also be guided by the provisions of rule 7.2-11 (Undertakings and trust conditions).

Agreement on guilty plea

5.1-7 Before a charge is laid or at any time after a charge is laid, a lawyer for an accused or potential accused may discuss with the prosecutor the possible disposition of the case, unless the client instructs otherwise.

5.1-8 A lawyer for an accused or potential accused may enter into an agreement with the prosecutor about a guilty plea if, following investigation,

- (a) the lawyer advises his or her client about the prospects for an acquittal or finding of guilt;
- (b) the lawyer advises the client of the implications and possible consequences of a guilty plea and particularly of the sentencing authority and discretion of the court, including the fact that the court is not bound by any agreement about a guilty plea;

Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia

- (c) the client voluntarily is prepared to admit the necessary factual and mental elements of the offence charged; and
- (d) the client voluntarily instructs the lawyer to enter into an agreement as to a guilty plea.

Commentary

[1] The public interest in the proper administration of justice should not be sacrificed in the interest of expediency.

5.2 The Lawyer as witness

Submission of evidence

5.2-1 A lawyer who appears as advocate must not testify or submit his or her own affidavit evidence before the tribunal unless

- (a) permitted to do so by law, the tribunal, the rules of court or the rules of procedure of the tribunal;
- (b) the matter is purely formal or uncontroverted; or
- (c) it is necessary in the interests of justice for the lawyer to give evidence.

Commentary

[1] A lawyer should not express personal opinions or beliefs or assert as a fact anything that is properly subject to legal proof, cross-examination or challenge. The lawyer should not, in effect, appear as an unsworn witness or put the lawyer's own credibility in issue. The lawyer who is a necessary witness should testify and entrust the conduct of the case to another lawyer. There are no restrictions on the advocate's right to cross-examine another lawyer, however, and the lawyer who does appear as a witness should not expect or receive special treatment because of professional status.

Appeals

5.2-2 A lawyer who is a witness in proceedings must not appear as advocate in any appeal from the decision in those proceedings, unless the matter about which he or she testified is purely formal or uncontroverted.