

This Month

- **Revolutionary Buy Out and Plan**
- **Client Relationships and Engagement**
- **Working methods to change**

Revolutionary Buy Out and Plan

We have to accept without doubt that law firms are undoubtedly now a business and under business pressures which can conflict with potentially providing dedicated and skilled work for clients.

Last month <http://www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/March2020.pdf> I referred to significant management issues facing firms

- Working Capital Management
- Business Development and Marketing
- Gross Profit Achievement
- Strategy and Succession Planning
- Management Style and Inclusion

I also have discussed the needs for potential Non-Executive Directors, outsourced accountancy and other outsourced facilities such as IT and telecommunications Infrastructure, Document Production, Telephone Answering, Web chats etc.

In December <http://www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/December2019.pdf> we looked at the likely decline in the number of law firms because of management/ownership issues and de-regulation.

Now – announced in March – we have the very positive management buy-out of the Jackson Lees Group lead by the CEO – Brian Cullen and COO – Joanna Kingston Davies. The new organisation is the MAPD Ventures (Making a Positive Difference). Funding and support comes from Shard Credit Partners <https://www.shardcreditpartners.com>.

The ambition is aggressive acquisition looking to quadruple the scale in the next three years throughout the UK. Currently 280 staff across six north west offices including Manchester and Liverpool.

This is not to be in the traditional sense of instant name change and new management dogma but enhancing back office management and support to the acquired businesses to enable the partners and lawyers to focus on growth by doing what they are best at and by growing doing what they enjoy in the best way.

There is a difference - Joanna Kingston-Davies, COO of JLG, noted: *“our strategy is predicated upon taking away the headache of “back office” for law firm owners to free up their time to focus on localised growth and development. By providing strong operating platforms and infrastructure with defined career structures and leadership, we will enable traditional law firms to deal with succession issues and to focus on what they do best.”*

Over the last few years we have been able to witness the controlled way that the IT and Telecommunications infrastructure and the Practice Case Management System was in a controlled

manner moved from acquired Lees Solicitors through the whole of the group whilst lawyers continued to be successful.

With the current pressures, and what I wrote about in December many firms have not really got an exit strategy agreed by owners, many haven't considered it but should be. My understanding is the methodology would be ideal in encouraging owners to think about what they would like to do in 5 or 6 years' time and if retirement or moving on is on the agenda then a formula can be agreed over objectives and payment plans. It is not designed for stress sales but geared to the phased growth of a successful venture.

Already the MAPD Group is in advanced discussions with three law firms in their sweet spot of £3million – £15million turnover range. The new venture is not however being overly prescriptive but open minded in scale and multiple work-types.

Client Relationships and Engagement

New policy and procedure for many but a key part of client acquisition and development where policies should be very clear, actioned and measured. Engagement with clients is also critical and so many are very frustrated with lack of communication even through live matters. There are developing solutions which need to be investigated.

Relationship Milestones

- A suspect
 - What is the profile of our ideal client for the multiple services that we have to offer
 - Have we a clear plan for communication and awareness
- A prospect
 - A profile fit, been specifically approached or has responded to activity or profile
 - Are we fully equipped for conversion of enquiries
- A first time client
 - The first matter of any work-type with the firm
 - Are they getting the expected service and communication
- A repeat client
 - Comes back for more of the same work-type – new property, Will update etc.
 - Performance and cross selling within the firm
- A majority client
 - The firm becomes the supplier of choice for all work-types
- A loyal client
 - Strong positive attitude with the firm.
 - Gives feedback on good and not so good things
 - Will give references, testimonials
- An advocate
 - Gives referrals of other prospects and businesses
 - Speaks on your behalf when opportunities arise when networking

Obviously not universal but I am seeing an increasing number of firms that categorise their clients by value, strategic importance and have plans to move them along the milestone path.

Communication and Engagement

My <http://www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/December2019.pdf> and <http://www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/January2020.pdf> articles explored new essentials and methods in staff engagement. Essential for retention and development of staff.

The way many firms interact with clients can cause within the client confusion, frustration and dissatisfaction. Improvement in that interaction with clients is a must to maintain the benefits gained from developing the relationship milestone. There are many people on the internet of an evening trying to work out the next actions in a case and they are often not shy about telling their friends about frustration.

As well as a key mind-set within the legal teams there have been improvements in facilities available from case management systems – do we know about them and make use of them? - and with third party products that can interface with multiple case management products – the benefits of course being happier clients, quicker file completions and a lot less telephone calls both inbound and outbound.

One third party supplier of the solution is Manchester based <https://www.in-case.co.uk/> who can demonstrate a number of testimonials and solutions like the <https://www.rowlinsons.co.uk/> conveyancing app launched in March.

There are also others in the market such as <https://thelinkapp.com/> and <http://engagesolutionsgroup.com/> and over the next few months I will research the solutions further

Homeworking – Resilience – Productivity – Client support

For years I have been advocating flexibility, mobility, agility, availability, outsourcing and security for law firms and client services. We have to be able to support our clients 24x7x52 as well as at Christmas.

Hopefully the last few weeks and necessary solutions for the next few months caused by the virus attack have focussed minds on the necessity to overcome inertia and to take steps for the inevitable benefits besides “home-working”

The justifications for hosted IT alone summarises all very well – IT servers in a secure and resilient data centre, with real-time back up in another datacentre overcomes the problem of not being able to access an office (floods, riots, flu), it provides business continuity, disaster recovery, cyber/data security (all essential for a supply chain), 24 hour working capability - irrespective of location - with mobile and simple laptops (without the data being stored on them). Not only that but it is paid for per user per month. When you add to this hosted telephony – similar benefits, outsourced transcription and document production and outsourced telephony and even chat bots for the web site.....

Firms of all sizes, including the top 100, should be making this a serious consideration and changing working methodology, that admittedly has been around for a long time but in many cases not been actioned because of resistance to change and other priorities.

It is also important that this move is also to firms that meet the necessary regulatory requirements, provide the right level of SLAs, have experience of the legal sector and can demonstrate performance through growth periods.

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