This Month

People.. people who have people ..and the right ones in time and place are much more than lucky. Cannot rely on luck

So many law firms at the moment are struggling to recruit and retain staff. Only a few have the right plans in place to ensure strategy achievement (geography, work -types, client types (new, retained, developed) efficiency, profitability, cash flow) all needing the right image, operations, empathy and demonstrable social conscience.

A few years ago, the prime recognition for law firms was very much the legal profile of lawyers. There has been a great change since the Legal Services Act because as well as that it has become increasingly important to ensure efficiency and cash flow, strong client relationships and empathy, a positive image for the business in terms of staff relationships and social contributions to the community. Not everyone is facing this challenge.

This is dependent on the right people in the right place at the right time and their perpetual development and management and communications. Law firms now need to make it clear to their staff and to the outside world that they fully embrace this challenge.

It is time to put the whole thing into perspective. There are many elements of this – starting with the firm's business strategy, the motivation and objectives of the owners and managers, the right job descriptions and profiles for recruits but also for existing staff and their development and motivation, honesty and positive communications between managers and staff, the right provision at the right time of performance statistics and on-going action plans for recovery and exploitation of opportunities, the right social conscience of the firm these days and its image internally and externally.

Over the last couple of years, I have dealt with multiple aspects of this
https://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles.php

https://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/January_2024.pdf - covers the strategy, owner and manager stocktake, proactive management, staff communication and management, image and brand, community awareness and resourcing.

https://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/March2022.pdf - covers Staff opinion and impressions given by management, candidate profile essentials, proactive audits of existing staff, appraisals.

https://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/October2023.pdf - covers annual resource reviews and the right coaching

https://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/June2023.pdf - covers business challenges, seniors needs and the rest, the right skills resourcing

https://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/September2022.pdf - covers staff communication and development including some great third parties - www.weekly10.com www.widerthinking.com www.your2050.org

https://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/November2021.pdf - covers equality and diversity and bullying impacts

https://professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/September2021.pdf - covers the right managers and approaches

Starting Point

All firms need to have a clear stock-take in terms of who they currently are – background in terms of where they have come from and their nature, style, philosophy and priorities and then the dimensions and scope – short term history of changes, growth or shrinkage. This with a clear statement of staffing levels by job type and profile – a year ago, now, and in two years. Headcount analysis by location and work-type including major clients, sources of business – any major stand outs.

Next the **Three-year business strategy** – main objectives, targeted areas (geography and work-types). The business priorities and challenges – leverage, efficiency, staff mix, business process and revenue, clients retained with more penetration and new. Risk management and compliance included with clients lost, lock up, pricing and demands.

Where does the business actually sit in terms of performance and where do we want it to be and what needs to be done to get there. Have we the skills and infrastructure to get there, what are the major challenges – what are we going to do and when?

This three-year strategy has to be recognised as identifying the budget for the next 12 months and needs a full review every year. What is also critical is that flexibility needs to be imbedded on a monthly basis during the budget year and revised monthly to take account of recovery needs, exploitation of particular successes and the state of the commercial market (transaction volumes, inflation or depression, availability of working capital, compliance and client and staff satisfaction levels.

We then need an **Owner and Manager stock-take** Key managers need to be up front in terms of desire/plans to stay in post, the roles they are most comfortable in whether it be skills demonstration or management contribution and where their motivation really is. Can they be developed to enhance contribution to the business or do we need a replacement programme at the highest level?

As well as making decisions to resource internally or move to outsourcing to up performance, skill levels and diminish risks. Is the succession plan in existence and being operated – partners need development and coaching as does everyone else.

Once our top-level strategy is in place (and constantly reviewed) all job roles in the business need enhancement in terms of **job descriptions with key accountabilities** under stood. But in addition to that the ideal profiles for the personality and skills of individuals doing those roles need to be very clear. Some firms do this for recruitment reasons but not all – very few constantly review existing staff against the requirements during monthly assessments or even appraisals. The result unmotivated staff, not communicating with one another and clients in the right way – performance **and satisfaction impact**

- Communication skills needed – reading, writing, presentations but also empathy with for example clients or other staff members and questioning ability to identify issues. Does the person need to be able to get favours from non-line managed people?

- Intellectual skills needed – goes beyond qualification but includes the ability to assimilate the needs and then select and present the relevant solutions from the portfolio. Plus, to ask for and handle objections

- Management skills needed – people yes maybe but also a case file or a project on time and within budget

- Motivation factors – is the person turned on by exceeding targets and the potential reward or by client satisfaction, team work or social and community involvement, personal development desire

- Emotional factors – is the person available to be able to work within the environment, changing all the time at the moment, commit the hours and the travel necessary to do the job.

When in the recruitment market it is essential that these additional factors are covered in interviews with open questions needing much more than a yes/no answer. Very few people are 100% which is absolutely fine but it enables the firm to be aware of slight adjustments to management and supervision plus training and development.

Appraisal systems and output need this analysis to help define the communication and performance by managers as well as the organisation of personal development programmes across the firm for best effect and the best ROI.

We cannot forget that recent surveys identified that as many as 65% of millennials within firms are seeking to leave and 42% of live matter clients are dissatisfied with lack of information and communication.

Most firm's **appraisal systems** need to be reviewed and updated and taken much more seriously and clarity is certainly needed for performance delivery against job specifications but also enhancements through the year. It needs to cover the essential personality profiles. The appraisee should complete a submission ahead of the face to face and ratings should come out of the sessions and then signed off by the management team for balance and commitments to a planned and budgeted development and training programme – or even job changes. The idea is to enhance performance to the business needs – so can cover time management, IT usage, motivation, client and other staff communication.

Diversity and Equality now has a major effect on staff motivation and morale and firms need to have a clear policy in place. It goes in line with the right approach **social conscience and community awareness.** This is being enhance recently with ESG and B Corp certifications. Increasingly important for staff retention (and clients) but with the right brands and profile – **best law firm to work for and best client relationship –** really does need a policy and strategy. This can be topped up with the people with the right profile internally – being the interfaces to the right profile's client and colleague – covering communication skills, intellectual skills, management and motivation. The idea is to avoid clashes and demonstrate understanding of issues and empathy.

Another significant assessment that is needed and staff trained and developed is client relationships and communication, and that applies to everyone in the firm. We do not want to hear "the solicitor was great but everyone was so rude in the reception are – I am not going back" Assessments and plans are available from third party experts.

Summary

It is essential that every firm has in place a great belief in the existing staff and performance to meet strategy and business priorities. It requires policies, procedures, communication. It requires decisions made on the resourcing of skills and capacity. Good staff management and motivation. The right image and brand will then aid profile with the customer and new client targets and switched on staff will remain, develop skills and commitments and be very attractive to potential recruits.

Some potential contributors to delivery

https://widerthinking.com/

www.your2050.org

www.weekly10.com

https://www.linkedin.com/company/quest-for-excellence-uk-ltd/about/

https://thinkbrandnotbland.co.uk/

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