

## This Month

- **Big Performance Impact**
  - Needs recognition and action
- **Our People Management**
  - Bullying Impact
- **Example**

It is becoming increasingly apparent that many firms are putting their performance and client relationships at risk along with strategy and succession achievement with how they are managing their staff.

Social media during October was very strong on this aspect (and it is other law firms, potential employees and clients who get to see this)

Law firm management has to step up - in the interests of their business in the short, medium and long term – the by-product being the development and motivation of their people, the reduction in mental stress and the retention of key performers. Clients also become aware and are quite prepared to make decisions on suppliers with the right social contribution and awareness. This also has to include equality and diversity actions and the new work:life balance requirements.

Some of the global bullies across many vertical markets are not helping their future and credibility with “get back to the office instructions” – the world has changed.

The potential costs to law firms failing to step up to this challenge can be massive

- Not achieving the numbers – profit, cash flow and insurance impact
- Unable to plan for a future – growing, merging, acquiring, MBO all at risk

Law firm management teams must step up. Bit of an introduction in <http://www.professionalchoiceconsultancy.com/articles/March2021.pdf>

An essential read <https://www.lawcare.org.uk/get-involved/life-in-the-law>

With the social media excess in October I have consulted with a couple of industry key advisers Jacqui Barrett - [jacqui@widerthinking.com](mailto:jacqui@widerthinking.com) founder and owner of [www.widerthinking.com](http://www.widerthinking.com) and Brian Rogers - [Brian.Rogers@theaccessgroup.com](mailto:Brian.Rogers@theaccessgroup.com) Regulatory Director Legal at [www.theaccessgroup.com](http://www.theaccessgroup.com)

**Jacqui's Observations** “Every organisation strives for better performance and a great reputation. Prosperity is also important, not just monetarily but through every individual's sense of belonging. So, how do we get there?”

These days we're all aware that diversity and inclusion matters. But you have to find out who your employees really are and what they really think, so you can dig deeper into knowing what needs to be done to improve the culture of your organisation.

It's really important that everyone acknowledges they have space to learn, and that everyone is involved, from the most junior to the most senior. The learning should not feel like a tick box or one-and-done exercise. Wider Thinking's successful approach has been to engage through awareness, challenge the status quo through strategy and measure the outcomes, with a report that looks not only at the self, but the team, leadership, workplace norms and the company's internal and external

reputation. If you can measure it, you can see how and where something may need to change. A better understanding of yourself and your employees will give you the tools to start meaningful conversations and actions.

Through our findings, one of the most important factors is allyship. Being an ally or advocate establishes trust, it brings different groups together creating equity within the workplace. It enables equal access to resources and opportunity. When employees feel included, the company and its people won't just survive but thrive.

Continuous work on improving inclusion and allyship demonstrates just how serious you are about tackling bullying and mental health. You're also sending a clear message about your reputation. Through creating a set of corporate values, you will be able to attract, retain and develop your employees. Happier staff means fewer sick days, higher productivity, greater innovation and a strong sense of loyalty.

Don't be left behind!"

It is time for many firms to get an honest assessment of staff status and then developing a plan to go forward for medium and long term future. It takes courage.

**Brian's Observations** "Bullying and harassment at work is not only totally unacceptable but also completely counter-productive, but for some inexplicable reason some of those working in law firms still think that this type of behaviour is acceptable and serves a purpose!

The recent Law Care survey that looked at life in the law found that 22% of participants had been subject to bullying, harassment or discrimination in the workplace, with burnout also being a problem with those aged between 26-35 being hit the hardest due to low autonomy, psychological safety and highest work intensity.

Those who are the target of bullying and harassment are very likely to suffer from mental illness as a consequence, for example, anxiety, mood swings, depression, and strains on their personal lives, all of which will have an impact on their performance at work, including, an inability to focus properly, a reduction in work output, and an inability to communicate well with colleagues.

Those who suffer from mental health issues as a consequence of bullying and harassment are unlikely to want to stay where they are so will move on, but not only will this lead to a loss of the affected employee but also others who see what they have been subjected to and don't want to be put in the same position in future; word will also get around the market that the firm is not one to work in, which will then lead to difficulties in recruiting staff, it is also likely to reach the ears of clients/prospective clients, which will impact on the firm's future sustainability.

Firms that currently have a 'toxic' culture need to change and change fast!

So, what should firms do?

- Operate a no bullying and harassment culture
- Open up communication lines between senior staff and others
- Ensure workloads are manageable and don't require long hours
- Operate effective working practices (not presenteeism)"

**Other**

In previous months I have explained key communications and information required and the contributions available from [www.katchr.com](http://www.katchr.com) and [www.weekly10.com](http://www.weekly10.com) but all that starts after clear business strategy and targets under perpetual review, communication with and acceptance and understanding by staff of all levels, clear personal development programmes and a team approach. Yes - there will always be poorer performers who have to be dealt with in a constructive way and removed if necessary – but this action will be watched by everyone else.

**Example** - Billable Hours realism for medium to long term futures

Another example on social media in the month was geared to some fee earners being targeted with 1,950 billable hours a year. I had to make a comment

The national industry benchmark tends to be 5 billable hours per working day - so c 1,150 hours per year which at £200 per hour is worth c£230,000 per annum - a reasonable contribution.

I have however seen some practices with double that hour's target - aided by 6 and 10 minute units. Yes a lot of pressure - although some with a certain mentality love it for a period - not likely to be forever.

At the other end of the scale fee earners not getting their 5 hours per day brings pressure on others - client satisfaction, profitability and working capital impact.

It comes back to firms needing a strategy, clarity of management and objectives, motivation, performance information and communication. Still a few with a way to go. Perhaps even more critical with the massive changes that have happened and will happen in the next 2 years.

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