

# LexisNexis In-house Advisory Board

## How to recruit and retain talent



## 1. Introduction

There is not one right way to recruit and retain talented people. Every role is unique according to time and circumstances. Businesses have to adapt their strategies to thrive and the same applies to the in-house legal team when it comes to recruitment and retention. Successfully finding and keeping the right people isn't just about HR policies and process; it is essential to have a clear purpose for the legal team and a vision of the roles and behaviours needed in the team to deliver value to the business.

In-house vacancies are being filled increasingly quickly. To recruit the right person for the job in this competitive market it is important to have a clear idea of what is needed from the candidate and be able to sell the team, the business and brand to them.

## 2. Practicalities

The Board opened with a discussion on whether the key issue is getting and keeping the right people or if it is about managing people to move on elsewhere. It was agreed that it is possible to keep people but in order for them to grow and develop they need to be kept moving. The real issue is therefore how to help people achieve their best.

Development has to be active and it has to be planned. The role of General Counsel is not to take charge of the development of

each individual in their team; instead, it is their job to provide opportunities and encourage people to participate in their own development.

The discussion flagged how lawyers in private practice tend to be competitive, work alone and are driven by fees and achievement. When they move to an in-house role it can be hard for them to adapt to an environment where team effort is all-important. Similarly, it can be hard for ex-private practice lawyers (as well as younger, more inexperienced members of the team) to



Honesty is about acknowledging where opportunities don't exist and then seeking out where they do. The Board felt that GCs have a responsibility to help employees develop and progress. It should be expected even if the opportunities available are recognised as limited. Formal and informal development should be institutionalised and transparent. This is central to retaining talent in the team.

## How can we create a culture that enhances and supports retention and the recruitment of the right candidates?

The Board considered whether a culture can be created that enhances and supports retention and the recruitment of the right candidates. The culture of the legal team can be different to that of the wider business but there needs to be some shared vision. Points to consider when creating and implementing a culture include:

What can you create, with what you've got, to attract talent?

Create a distinctive culture as this can help when hiring future staff.

In terms of what appeals, much depends on the role that is being filled. For example, junior lawyers could be more interested in a role due to the hype of the brand or the style of the offices rather than the role itself.

To help legal rise up the value chain, prove yourself to other teams in the business.

Try to play to your strengths and value your weaknesses.

Defend your team to the CEO. If someone is held accountable for a mistake, step in and take the flack by stating you're responsible for the team and you'll deal with it. Without this the trust of the team can be eroded.

The Board agreed that it is incumbent on the GC to work out how to implement a culture in the team and, ultimately, to drive it.

## How can we create a framework for learning and development?

The Board explored how brand is core to a recruitment strategy. People often come to a business on the strength of the brand and not because of the role. A Board member gave the example of a GC who had recruited someone on the strength of their offices – they had a reputation for being better than Google's!

To hire talent, GCs need to engage with the type of people they want to hire and sell the quality of the work and the culture of the team. In-house has an advantage in that people are often trying to get away from private practice. The Board suggested a number of tactics for recruiting the right talent to the team:

Emphasise how the hours are better than private practice – the work can be demanding at times but there is greater flexibility.

Resist making salary offers just to capture a candidate. Make offers based on what people in the team are already being paid – this makes for a fair system.

Discuss the grades system and opportunities for progression. Be prepared to answer the question "Where am I going to be in 6 months to 2 years' time?"

Bring someone senior into the interview to demonstrate how serious the process is.

Are they going to fit with the culture? They may be able to do the job but that's not enough if they don't fit in with the culture of the team.

Psychometric testing. This can be startlingly accurate and help identify strengths and weaknesses. The Board had mixed feelings about these tests though; some members argued that they simply confirm what you already know about someone and can't be validated.

Insights testing is a good way to categorise people, for example to find out whether they are an analyst or a team player. It can highlight how they would fit in the structure and if they would work well with the team.

## How can we create a framework for learning and development?

Having a framework in place for learning and development is



**Ab<sup>u</sup> la W**

Ian is an experienced Chief Legal Officer/Company Secretary for both listed & major private companies and he has worked across sectors including financial services, retail and construction. He acts as consultant specialising in corporate governance for boards and in-house legal team management and performance. Ian has a particular interest evaluating board performance. As well as being a lawyer, Ian has an MBA from Ashridge Business School and he has recently trained as a coach completing the Professional Coaching Skills Certificate run by Coaching Development and accredited by the International Coaching Federation. Ian acts as a coach and mentor to a number of individuals.

In addition to undertaking work for LBC Ian has experience as:

- an Associate of Karen Walls Associates, a consultancy specialising in leadership and organisational behaviour;
- a Visiting Lecturer at Ashridge Business School.
- an Associate of Winmark who run the Chief Legal Officer Programme. Ian runs courses on corporate governance and legal risk management for a number of organisations.
- Ian is the author Managing Business and Legal Risk In House Best Practice Guide 2013 for Winmark.

In his spare time, Ian is currently an Interim Chief Legal Officer for a financial services organisation and a Trustee of Fitzroy, a charity for people with learning disabilities.

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Paul leads many of LBC's significant projects and lectures widely at events and conferences in the UK, Europe, North America and South Africa. Themes include legal services strategy, skills development and the changing face of the legal profession.

Paul qualified as a UK solicitor in 1987 and for much of his career he was an in-house lawyer. Paul was the General Counsel in two major UK financial services companies and held positions as chairman and chief executive of the national in-house lawyers Commerce & Industry Group. For six years Paul was a Council Member of the England & Wales Law Society and was elected to the Society's Main Management Board. Until 2014 he was also Vice-Chairman and a Trustee of LawWorks, the UK's national pro bono charity.

Paul is a successful author with six books and over one-hundred published articles in the UK, Europe

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