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No more lip service – put your money where your mouth is

When are law firms going to stop tiptoeing around the issue of female talent drain and tackle it head on? In England and Wales, there is an average £125,000 replacement cost when a partner leaves. 150,128 solicitors are on the roll, 61.8 per cent of new trainees were women, 8,002 women partners. You like data and facts, you do the maths.

Women are a great asset and firms need to create an environment where they thrive, not just because it pleases their clients' diversity policy. Funding maternity leave only for these talented lawyers to leave does not make commercial sense. Funding women, or men, to train and then leave because their work-life balance is overly compromised no longer adds up, as these fees cannot be passed on to clients.

productive working of all staff, and supports the retention of women in the law.

It's time to change. Failure to do so will mean that the best talent is repelled from working with your firm, and talent in the law is everything.

Value differences

The key issue is not what percentage of women is in a partnership but how women's qualities can help their firms to solve their problems, survive and evolve.

There has never been a greater need for the qualities that women bring to the legal profession: relationship building, motivating others and empathy. However, these qualities are not held in as high esteem as rainmaking, despite the value they bring.

As long as rainmaking and fee earning is king, women will be second-class citizens and support staff will be third class.

Women dislike self-promotion and put others first. They don't often ask for a salary rise, but men do. This is often why they are paid less than men. It is not because men are overtly biased against them.

Isn't cross-selling something that you want more of? What structures does your firm have in place to enable this? Women naturally think of others and make links. Make use of this quality. They can help herd the pigs, even if they don't bring home the bacon themselves.

If the legal profession redirected the energy it is putting into resisting change into making it happen, it will be in a better position in the years to come.

Unconscious bias is normal, we all have it. Difference is useful. Isn't it about time we stopped being so politically correct and worked as a collective team, playing to strengths? mp

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The Lord Davies report *Women on Boards* said that leaders of FTSE 350 companies should set the percentage of women they have on their boards based on the needs and characteristics of the business. Since a law firm is primarily a male partnership and the need is about maximising billings, this is not going to change much. What does need to be addressed, however, is the huge, expensive and preventable problem of female talent drain from the profession.

How ironic it is that it took a downturn for the legal profession to embrace flexible working, such as at Norton Rose where it adopted a four-day week job-saving policy. Is it so difficult to make work flexible to enable women to stay in the law? Men want it too, as do the younger generation.

Saying that clients demand a 24/7 service is a convenient smokescreen to avoid tackling the issue. This is true for some practice areas, but a minority. Technology enables efficiency and