

Talent Management for Lawyers: A Hands-On Guide

RACHEL BRUSHFIELD



Talent Management for Lawyers: A Hands-On Guide

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Executive summary

TALENT IS everything in law. Lawyers are the only true source of competitive advantage for a firm, so managing them is a crucial skill and a priority to learn.

The people in your firm are a key resource. As with any group, there will be a wide range of abilities, strengths and attitudes within your team, which will mean that some people are better than others at furthering the firm's goals, and different individuals need a different approach.

We are living in a knowledge economy and there is a talent shortage. Firms need employees with the right skills and attitude to fit their culture and help them achieve business objectives. 'Talent' is the word used to describe these employees. 'Employer brand' refers to your firm's image and its ability to attract future stars who have the optimal skills, qualities and experience and want to join your firm, rather than your competitors.

Managing talent, therefore, is about attracting, developing, engaging and retaining talented employees. As a lawyer there is pressure to focus on fee earning, which can mean you think short term, but making time to master talent management will create more fees in the long term, because you can leverage billings through their efforts, not just your own.

Managing talent well takes time, combined with high levels of self-awareness and confidence. Great talents present you, their manager, with challenges: they take up your precious time and then may get fast-track promotion out of your practice group. Also, they are bright and know their value, so they can challenge your authority and your patience.

On the other hand, you can learn a lot from them, and they could be employing you in the future, in which case you will be getting a return on your investment of time and energy.

This book is made up of 14 chapters, each including five tips and three actions to promote successful talent management. There are also frequently

asked questions (FAQ) and a glossary of commonly used terms in the Appendices.

Chapter 1 explores who is talent, including different firm definitions, rainmaking and a broader view of talent.

Chapter 2 examines what talent management is with a definition, what talent management includes and trends.

Chapter 3 probes good talent management practice including how to become skilled at managing talent, making it a priority, giving feedback well, engaging and motivating talent and the importance of adopting a flexible approach.

Chapter 4 probes bad talent management practice, such as presenteeism, how a targeted approach is important as one size doesn't fit all and the dangers of not taking responsibility for talent management, with resulting bruised psychological contracts.

Chapter 5 uncovers common barriers to successful talent management, which include shortage of time and how to overcome it, issues with delegation and trust, ego and lack of confidence, territorial rather than collaborative behaviour around clients, a billings focus and thinking short term rather than long term. It also explores the negative impact of stress and pressure and prioritising employees second to clients.

Chapter 6 shares tips about how to develop your line management capability, such as developing talent management skill, seeing the importance of managing talent, using a coaching style of management and modelling excellence – replicating the actions of people who are naturally good at it.

Chapter 7 probes the importance of emotional intelligence in managing talent including empathy, listening and reflecting back, incisive questions, acknowledgment and understanding how different people have different world views.

Chapter 8 examines how keeping the long-term view is essential for talent management to happen in reality and explores key issues that can inhibit this, including putting money before people, the conflict of the pressure of short-term results versus sustainable success and how the lawyer mindset can get in the way.

Chapter 9 looks at the importance of a diverse view of talent, including managing various groups with specific characteristics, such as young talent, female talent, ethnic minority talent and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) talent.

Chapter 10 takes the subject of talent and performance development and examines why development is important, why appraisals matter, how being specific can make a big difference when communicating and the importance of tackling rather than avoiding difficult conversations.

Chapter 11 looks at talent and career management including career paths, how one size doesn't fit all and why becoming a partner is not the Holy Grail, or indeed an attainable career goal for all lawyers. It explains the importance of remaining unthreatened by talent progression and how forward planning and succession programmes protect the firm's strength and client relationships.

Chapter 12 explores talent and rewards, including how important giving acknowledgement is and why it is not just about money – other ideas can be very powerful rewards and ways of providing recognition. It also highlights the importance of understanding an individual's values regarding their fulfilment and satisfaction at work.

Chapter 13 shares examples of talent management excellence including magic circle firms, innovative case studies and award winning initiatives, to help managers think about what they can learn from them and apply at their own firms.

Finally, Chapter 14 shares views of talent management 'from the horse's mouth', from a range of lawyers at different levels from diverse firms and other legal services industry experts.

About the author

RACHEL BRUSHFIELD studied marketing at Sheffield Hallam University and evolved her career from marketing products and services, through brand strategy and communication consultancy, to marketing people and talent engagement. She is a certified neuro linguistic programming (NLP) coach and enjoys a portfolio career, which includes writing, career and executive coaching, talent management and engagement research and consultancy, and career and business development information and marketing products.

Rachel's fascination with new markets, what makes people tick, insights and supporting professionals to embrace change and realise their full potential led her to discover and explore the wonderful area of law. She has written over 15 articles on the topics of talent management and engagement, career development and female lawyer success for organisations including *Managing Partner* magazine, Ark and the Association of Women Solicitors. Rachel also writes a blog for *The Law Society Gazette*.

Rachel is a 'talent liberator'. She helps lawyers and other professionals to liberate their talent; to play to their strengths, increase their self-awareness and confidence and work smart – stopping them from preventing their own success. Her company Energise is an official partner of *The Telegraph* Media Group and her clients include Peter Cornell, formerly managing partner at Clifford Chance, and Duncan Goose, winner of a 'Greatest Britons Award' in 2007. For more information, visit: <http://energiselegal.com>

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Foreword

TALENT MANAGEMENT is a fascinating and wide-ranging topic that lawyers need to embrace to be successful in their careers. In a nutshell, it is about getting the most out of people. Let's face it: few lawyers enter the law because they want to manage people. Some even see management as a necessary evil. I promise you, while at times managing people can feel like herding cats (especially independent, single-minded lawyers) it's not that bad and can really be very rewarding for you. There is bound to be a bit of talent management that you love as much as lawyering.

Just as seeing a child develop and grow over time and having an impact on their confidence and skill is in the hands of a parent or supportive adult, so realising the full potential of a direct report can be influenced by the actions, attitude and time invested by their manager. Not only do they grow – so do you; and you can leverage more fees for your practice group and the firm as a result. Learning and people development is not always as quantifiable as fees, which is why some lawyers think this area is soft and fluffy. Doing it creates fees. Doing it well results in more fees.

Few professions carry such a wide-ranging responsibility as being a partner in a law firm. Not only do you have to be a good lawyer technically; continually develop your legal knowledge and keep up to date; be brilliant at business development and client relationship management (CRM); and be a debt collector and a feather smoother. In your spare time, you need to attract, develop, motivate, manage and retain talented professionals as well. After all, talent is the only true source of competitive advantage that a firm has in an increasingly difficult market. So, remember this when you are tempted to take that one-to-one meeting out of the diary, delay a performance appraisal or put career conversations at the bottom of your 'to do' list.

Who is talent and how talent management is defined varies by firm, which only serves to keep you on your toes and makes it important to read this book

and adapt its content to your firm – in turn, developing your own approach to talent management.

I hope this digest helps to make your life easier and provides an insightful and practical resource that you can return to again and again throughout your career. I also hope it helps you to liberate your own talent, as well as that of your direct reports. Making talent management a priority is a decision you will not regret.