

ePaper

How a culture of creativity helps modern law firms to remain competitive





How a culture of creativity helps modern law firms to remain competitive.

John Wallace, managing director at Ridgemont Solicitors, shares his thoughts on how creativity can help law firms retain a competitive edge.

I was delighted to take part in Osprey Approach's webinar series, [Build Better Habits](#), alongside guest speaker Sarah Keegan, co-founder of the CS Partnership.

Osprey's marketing manager and panel host, Amy Bruce, was keen for us to explore the ways in which [creativity can help modern law firms' competitiveness](#) and specifically, the ways in which firms can successfully implement a culture of creativity; the benefits of doing so; and, how to prioritise continuous improvement.

What does creativity mean for law firms?

The session began by defining what creativity means and what that might look like within a law firm. Sarah and I agreed that it's about considering new ideas that don't follow the status quo; to think and do things differently.

Creativity in law is about thinking differently about the way we offer legal advice - for example, moving away from emails and telephone calls to different modes of communication.

Creativity needs space and time to flourish, as Sarah explained: "Firms need to allow a pause. Employees need to be able to step away from their desks to review what they're doing, why they're doing it, and to ask themselves 'could this be done differently?'"

At Ridgemont, there are several ways we prioritise creativity. Whilst law firms are pretty good at getting their lawyers' CPD to continue their personal legal development, it's also important that lawyers understand business. Our entire team has access to a business coach; they'll read great business books and watch online courses to help them develop their understanding of how a business works.

Give staff the freedom to be creative

Often, it's the structure of a firm that hinders innovation.

Creativity is something firms have struggled with, which is largely down to the traditional partnership model and often hampers adaptability and quick decision making. If a fee earner wants to make a change there are so many people that have to say yes. It's not pragmatic for change to occur, so nothing changes.

Sarah agreed, and added that "for creativity to thrive, the attitude of law firm leaders need to reflect that. Innovation has to come from the top, or at least approved at the top otherwise it'll kill the culture."

Why is creativity beneficial for law firms?

Sarah and I agreed that creativity helps to tackle the legal sector's top two challenges: attracting clients and recruitment.

Sarah warned of the dangers of sticking to the status quo: "The world is changing. There is a lot of evidence that prove people's behaviours rapidly change after major life events - a pandemic included. So if law firms can't adapt and consider change then they'll be left behind."

There is common ground when it comes to both attracting clients and recruiting talent: firms need to consider what individuals now find attractive. Aligning your firm's mission and values to that of its employees and clients will continue to have a growing impact on their decision to work with your firm.

Those entering the legal sector today have different expectations. They don't want to work at one firm their whole career, work on weekends, or be stressed at work - so law firms are going to have to think and recruit differently.

Six habits law firms should adopt

Sarah and I agreed that modern law firms should focus on the following habits when implementing a culture of creativity and innovation:

- 1. Cross-departmental communication**
To encourage change, communication is key. Departments need to share their successes and failures to help encourage improvement and change across teams and processes. Creating a system where individuals can easily share will help prioritise innovation.
- 2. Regular meetings**
Opportunities to share ideas as a group provides space for brainstorming which encourages creativity. At Ridgemont, we hold regular 'What Else' meetings, which bring the whole team together and ask, 'what else can we do to improve the client journey and make the business better?' You need to encourage people to come prepared and voice their ideas.
- 3. Modelling behaviour**
Team leaders, management, and partners must model the behaviour they want to see throughout the firm for the culture to change. Sarah added: "the culture has to come from the top down. In John's firm for example, he embodies creativity and therefore it'll be reflected in everyone he hires."

4. Set expectations

Clear expectations of behaviours and accountability need to be set out to ensure the right actions are encouraged. Sarah recommended that firms set clear expectations “by putting them in people’s appraisals.” Performance measures need to go beyond billable hours or case numbers and should incorporate other cultural expectations to help foster the right values.

5. Action ideas

To motivate teams to share ideas and experiment, you’ve got to action some of the ideas in the regular team meetings to drive change and motivate individuals, so that they will continue to experiment and share.

6. Prioritise creativity when hiring

Firms should do this at the point of recruitment in order to foster the culture firm-wide. I recommend that creativity is high up in the qualities you’re looking for in people, as much as you would prioritise experience.

Should law firms prioritise creativity, continuous improvement, and innovation?

Even in turbulent and unpredictable times, law firms should prioritise continuous improvement and innovation.

Creativity shouldn’t be seen as an ‘instead of’ to the traditional fee earning structure that firms typically focus on.

In a market where there are more and more lawyers and law firms, practices have to find a way to differentiate themselves and creativity offers that opportunity.

Sarah agreed that creativity is vital in a changing world and added that firms should turn to technology to implement quick, impactful wins for optimising a law firm’s operations and services.

Prioritise and implement a creative culture for long-term success

Having a creative and innovative approach to running a law firm and delivering legal advice is required for long-term success. A continuous improvement mindset helps firms tackle the biggest sectoral challenges of managing client expectations and attracting and retaining talent.

Creativity is a focus on experimentation, which can sometimes involve failure. All firms can make immediate progress by simply encouraging questions to be asked and ideas to be shared.

Watch the [on-demand episode now](#) or you can access all previous episodes in the [Build Better Habits series here](#).

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