



RECRUITMENT BACKGROUND

The position of non-lawyer Chief Executives has emerged in a small but increasing number of law firms. Typically they evolve in firms with a Managing Partner supported by professional managers.

It is frequently recognised that management skills are required, particularly where the Managing Partner does not wish to stand again and so return to client matters, and where firms have lost the fee earning capability that a Managing Partner can bring. A Chief Executive can help evolve a business strategy and can relieve them of tedious administrative responsibilities and routine tasks.

Where a Managing Partner retires, remaining Partners often recognise that they do not have the dual expertise and skills to lead and manage the firm, or simply do not have the interest to do so.

Whilst non-lawyer leaders add value and Clementi has recognised that, they need to be treated as equal partners. To realise best value, Partners may need to reflect upon and support a change in the culture and approach of the firm.

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE – ROLE REQUIREMENTS & OBSERVATIONS

Objectivity

- . A Chief Executive does everything that a Managing Partner does, but without the distraction of fee-earning work.
- . They have to work with objectivity and lack of partisanship. Aware of politics but usually not part of them.
- . They understand and cope with the ambiguities and pressures of being a Partner and are a 'hybrid' of shareholder, owner, team manager and case worker.
- . They understand the motivators for Partners and fee earners aspiring to be Partners. Equally they understand those who have no such ambitions.
- . They understand the clients' requirements and needs.
- . They understand the inter-dependencies of each law practice area within the firm.

The Partnership

- . The Chief Executive reports to the Partnership, but Partners report to him/her.
- . They have the confidence of the Partners who know they will consult and seek opinion when required, but are safe in the knowledge that they have the experience to act on their known authority when appropriate. Put simply they have the authority to dismiss the Senior Partners long serving secretary and the discretion not to.
- . They can talk to Partners on a peer basis, giving guidance and advice and encouragement when needed.

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- . They will co-ordinate, coach, support and challenge the Partners to develop the business.

The Main Purpose

- . They facilitate the setting of the firm's strategy and are empowered to achieve it.
- . They deal with the big picture and everything else that smacks of trivia.
- . They develop the business, improving the motivation and productivity of its people and its profitability, through integrated planning processes, effective business development, professional operations management and sound financial administration.
- . If something goes wrong they take the blame, but also see and deal with things before they become a problem.
- . They have an in-depth knowledge of partnerships, how they are structured, financed and regulated.
- . They manage the firm, its organisation, its meetings, its internal administration, technology, finance, appearance and behaviour.
- . With Heads of Department they manage the workload, the fee-earning staff and the support resources.
- . With the Heads of Support they direct Accounts and Finance, IT, HR and Marketing functions.

Overall

- . A Chief Executive has compassion as well as drive, time for people as well as events.
- . They are not the titular head, are not the Senior Partner or Managing Partner, they are the Chief Executive - an employee, albeit the most senior employee, but an employee nonetheless who brings professional management experience to the firm and enables the partners to be successful lawyers.

CAN YOU JUSTIFY THE APPOINTMENT?

- . Is the practice big enough?
- . Is your culture so strong that an outsider cannot change it to benefit the firm's performance?
- . Will the Partners accept or undermine the appointment on the grounds that they could refuse to accept accountability or responsibility and the culture of the firm is such that there is no intent to change?
- . Will Partners accept a change in control?

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESS?

- . Will they be able to give sustainable competitive advantage to the firm?
- . Can they add to the firm's profitability?
- . What elements can they add in devising strategy and policies, structures, enhancing the profile of the firm?
- . Do they understand your culture and values and can they maintain or further enhance them?
- . Can they add an alternative perspective that helps the firm continue to evolve?

. Do they have relevant management skills to develop and manage the complexities of the firm and improve financial management?