

SUMMARY

by Julia Robinson

THE CITY OF LONDON LAW SOCIETY'S TRAINING COMMITTEE

WEBINAR ON
COACHING AND
MENTORING IN CITY
LAW FIRMS

MONDAY 9 MAY 2022



LAST WEEK

I hosted a panel on coaching and mentoring for the City of London Law Society's training committee. I was joined by Rosie Warren-Cafferty from Dechert, Rachel Wevill from Travers Smith, Dorothea Bannerman-Bruce and Sabina Clark from Linklaters, and Executive Coach & Supervisor, Fiona Rice of Rice Consultancy.

Just under 80 partners and senior learning and development professionals from across the CLLS member firms attended.

PROGRAMMES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Each of the law firm speakers highlighted a particular coaching or mentoring programme they were currently offering and talked about its impact and the lessons they had learned.

Rachel spoke about a junior associate programme that included both individual coaching and group sessions where common themes could be explored. This was created in response to feedback asking for a more individual approach and to support junior associates with taking a proactive approach to their careers from an earlier stage.

Dot and Sabina talked about their international mentoring programme for new managing associates, which made a virtue of the multi-office network by offering associates the opportunity to match with a broader range of partners. This meant matching was highly tailored. Some partners were requested by multiple associates so a recording was created of them sharing their advice for the benefit of the whole cohort, which was very well received.

Rosie described a programme introduced at Dechert to support partner candidates with writing their business plans. The offering combined training sessions, mentoring from a carefully matched partner (a 'business plan adviser'), as well as coaching, and had led to a notable increase in the quality of each cohort's business plans.

THEMES FROM PARTNER

COACHING

We closed the first half with some observations from Fiona Rice on coaching senior partners across the City.

I asked Fiona what themes she was seeing and whether these have changed over the last couple of years. She saw the themes as falling into three categories: first, the more general challenges that are always relevant for partners - managing a team, providing feedback, efficiency etc; secondly, the bigger issues like strategy, business planning and navigating firm politics; and thirdly, the deeper material relating to self-worth, self-confidence, wellbeing etc.

Fiona said that since the pandemic started there has been even greater pressure on partners. While there was understandably a great deal of focus on the wellbeing of junior lawyers, there seemed to have been less emphasis on looking after the partners. They had lost the opportunity to discuss challenges easily with their peers in the office and like others were dealing with the last vestiges of the barrier between work and home life disappearing.



While most partners support the return to the office, and Fiona is increasingly meeting clients in person for coaching, there are new challenges around how to manage and motivate juniors effectively. These are being compounded by the war on talent.

Fiona singled out recent lateral partners as being especially likely to benefit from coaching given how difficult it is to build new relationships and learn about their new firms quickly in this hybrid environment.

PANEL DISCUSSION

After a short period where attendees met in breakout rooms to discuss their firms' experience of coaching and mentoring, the speakers returned for a discussion, which is summarised below:

BUY IN/TAKE UP

On the partner side, the panel agreed that regardless of time pressure, partners continued to prioritise their role as mentors. Some firms had formal reverse-mentoring programmes, which were highly valued by senior leaders, but even in the mentor role partners experienced some informal reverse mentoring benefits. On the associate side, word of mouth and feedback from pilot programmes were very important. Recently made-up partners were often the best adverts for these programmes as they could speak to the benefits they had personally gained from them.

FORMAT

Remote working has made coaching and mentoring via online platforms the norm. There is a return to some face-to-face coaching especially for initial meetings but less often for a whole coaching programme, and not for the international programmes where part of their success has been the ability to connect people across offices.

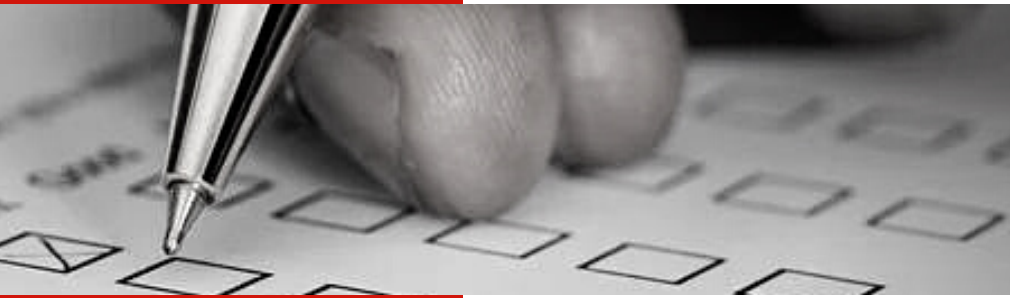
INTERNAL COACHING

One of the most interesting findings from the pre-webinar survey (see below) was that all but one firm had some internal coaching provision. It was agreed that seniority was the most likely differentiator between who was matched with an external rather than an internal coach but that this was more at the very senior levels where an outside perspective was most beneficial. Some more junior partners were choosing to continue to work with an internal coach having built up a relationship they valued as they had risen to partner.

I asked Fiona in her capacity as a coach supervisor whether she had any advice for firms given this increase in the provision of internal coaching. She spoke of the value these coaches were providing and agreed that it was important for law firms to make sure they have access to regular supervision by a qualified supervisor, either in groups or one-to-one, so they feel supported, and standards are maintained.

SURVEY

THE FIRMS PARTICIPATING IN THE WEBINAR HAD BEEN ASKED TO COMPLETE AN ANONYMOUS SURVEY IN ADVANCE. OF THE 38 CITY FIRMS REPRESENTED, 26 COMPLETED THE SURVEY.



ABOUT

JULIA ROBINSON

is Senior Manager for Professional Development and Training at Ropes & Gray International LLP and Vice-chair of the City of London Law Society's training committee

ROSIE WARREN-CAFFERTY

is Global Director of Learning and Development at Dechert LLP, as well as a member of the committee

RACHEL WEVILL

is Senior Learning and Development Manager at Travers Smith LLP and a member of the committee

DOROTHEA BANNERMAN-BRUCE

is Senior Manager for Learning at Linklaters LLP

SABINA CLARK

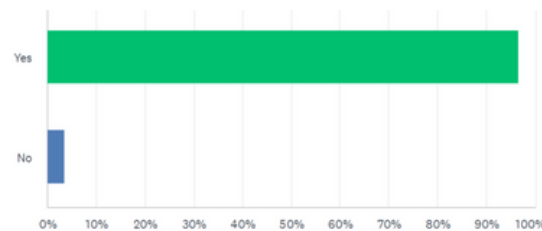
is a Learning and Development Consultant at Linklaters LLP and the committee's Clerk

FIONA RICE

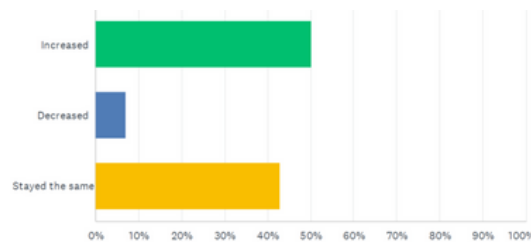
is an Executive Coach, Consultant and Coach Supervisor at Rice Consultancy

HERE ARE A FEW KEY TAKEAWAYS:

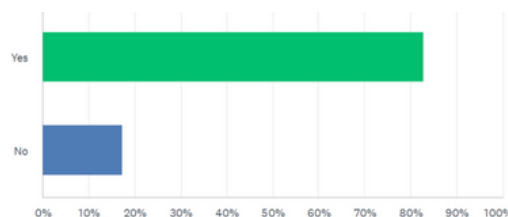
- ALL BUT ONE FIRM OFFERED COACHING TO THEIR LAWYERS:



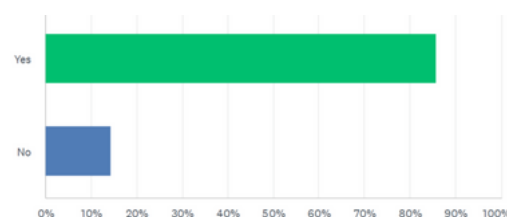
- HALF SAID THE COACHING PROVISION HAD INCREASED DURING THE PANDEMIC, 43% SAID IT HAD STAYED THE SAME AND JUST 7% SAID IT HAD DECREASED.



- NEARLY 83% EMPLOYED INTERNAL COACHES AND ALL EXCEPT ONE USED EXTERNAL COACHES.



- 85% HAD AN INTERNAL MENTORING OFFERING AND THIS HAD LARGELY STAYED THE SAME WITH A THIRD SAYING IT HAD INCREASED.



CHALLENGES CITED ON THE COACHING SIDE WERE TIME (THE LAWYERS) AND COST OR CAPACITY IN THE CASE OF THE INTERNAL PROVISION.

THE SURVEY ANSWERS ALSO INCLUDED A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF QUALITATIVE DATA. THIS HAS BEEN SHARED WITH THE FIRMS WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY.