

## **Riding the wave of change**

The career ladder of today's successful law firm partner is not linear. Whether it is becoming managing partner, practice leader, new partner or leaving altogether, there are many transition points along the way.

The outward changes are obvious, but underpinning psychological shifts are also needed to make such transitions a success. Sometimes it is just changing behaviour, but sometimes it is a subtle shift in identity, such as from fee-earner to proprietor. The first key to coping with a career change is to be clear about what the change means to you and what you want from it. Try to grasp what really motivates you. Connecting with this helps one navigate better through complex situations. Be proactive in managing the expectations of those around you.

Lessons learnt from past transitions can also be invaluable. Ask yourself: what did I do the last time this happened? And what did I do that will not help me this time? What didn't I do last time that with hindsight I should have done? Who supported me then and are they still supporting me right now? Career moves to or within partner level often require lawyers to move from doing things themselves to getting the most out of others. So they need a new level of understanding of the motivations and personality differences within their teams. Psychometrics can be a helpful tool, but make sure they are soundly research-based ones.

Thinking that new roles can be bolted on to what is already a full agenda is guaranteed to lead to stress and frustration - initially yours, and then others'. Something will have to go. Get clear about what is important to you and manage your time against those priorities.

Most changes require you to take a long hard look at whether there are new skills you need to acquire and new kinds of support.

In an environment where credibility is key and visibility is high, trying out new ways of working can be daunting - particularly when it is with the same team you had before. But almost certainly, different ways of leading, deciding and acting will be needed.

So see if you can find or create a safe place to try new things out. Pro bono work might offer such an opportunity, or rehearsing offline with a business coach or mentor.

Ask: what will I try, on whom and when? How do I tell people I am trying something different? Who will give me honest feedback? By setting clear goals, reviewing priorities, trying out new ways of working, learning from experiences and being prepared to get others involved, transitions can be more effective and even - dare we say it - enjoyable.

*Henry Marsden, faculty member, Meyler Campbell*