

## **Marketing Society Awards for Excellence 2013**

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### **Employee Engagement – Summary**

#### **Objective**

Our objective was to transform employee engagement and along with it, the success and profitability of the firm. We wanted to move from a workforce where morale was low, information sharing was poor and staff felt underappreciated to one where staff felt engaged, positive about the firm and had access to all of the information they needed about the firm's progress, ambitions and the part they could play in its success.

#### **Scale of the task**

The scale of the task was large, and made more so by our modest budget (£11,000) and small team of two. We undertook a radical overhaul of our internal communications including, introducing:

- i a staff away day
- i Managing Partner roadshows
- i New regular communications from the Managing Partner
- i Client service action groups
- i Information sharing events
- i Positive postcards
- i Staff awards scheme

#### **Key results**

In all measures, we have exceeded our targets:

- i By the end of the financial year 12/13 the firm's turnover will have increased by 12 per cent (from £10.7 million to £12 million) and profits by 16 per cent (from £3 million to £3.5 million).
- i The focus groups after the campaign showed positive change and more of a one-firm feeling. Staff felt that they were more aware of what was happening in the firm and future plans, and that senior staff were more approachable. The fact that so many of the ideas suggested by staff were implemented was appreciated.
- i Lexcel audit, which includes interviews with randomly selected staff across each office, highlighted internal communications as an area of good practice. The audit showed that staff reported internal communications had improved and were now considered to be good.
- i Improved rankings for the firm in independent guides to the legal profession.

## Employee Engagement

### Introduction

This is the story of a transformation; of a re-energised workforce making a massive difference to the success of a company, resulting in a 12 per cent increase in turnover and 16 per cent increase in profits in just two years. And what is perhaps the most remarkable part of our story, is that we are not a huge company with a massive budget. We could not afford to hire expensive consultants or external support. All of our results were achieved by the commitment and dedication of a small marketing team of just two people, with the support of the HR Director and senior management team. We are a modest sized firm, with a modest budget, but we know that our ambition and vision can match any of the big names.

We are Stephens Scown LLP. A firm of solicitors based in Devon and Cornwall. Our 40 partners and 200 staff are based across three offices in Exeter, St Austell and Truro and we help businesses and private individuals with everything from disputes to divorces; restructuring companies to inheritance planning; massive renewable energy projects to buying a home. Our client list is impressive too – running from the Dragons from BBC's Dragon's Den and international firms to some of the biggest landed estates in the region.

Although the ending to our story is happy, the start is not. It starts with a disjointed workforce, stuck in silos working with colleagues in their own office, but not sharing with others across the firm. Morale was low and we knew that it must be affecting our client service and bottom line.

Starting in January 2010 we embarked on an employee engagement programme to do something about it.

### Pre-campaign research

To help us understand the issues we were facing, we carried out the following research:

- i Full staff survey
- i Focus groups with staff – two for each office, each with 10 staff members involved. These were used to establish the issues, but also to gather suggestions from staff on how we could improve
- i Analysis of the results of our Lexcel audit – the management practice standard set out by the Law Society
- i We analysed the available independent assessments of the firm, namely our rankings in independent legal guides Legal 500 and Chambers, as well as Lex 100, which reviews what trainees think of their firms.
- i Review of the financial performance of the firm

## The situation

The headlines from this extensive researched showed:

- i Low morale among staff
- i Staff felt internal communication was poor
- i Staff identified with their own office, but did not feel part of the wider firm. This manifested itself in a lack of information sharing across the firm
- i Staff felt that partners and the board were not sharing information with them, especially information on the firm's strategy, financial performance, future plans etc.
- i Staff wanted more dialogue from the Managing Partner and Board, who were also seen as aloof
- i There was a feeling of being underappreciated and not being thanked for hard work
- i Staff wanted more timely information about firm news and staff changes

## Objectives

We set the following objectives for both employee engagement and the overall performance of the firm.

- i To increase turnover by 10 per cent and profits by 12 per cent by the end of the financial year 12/13
- i To increase our rankings in independent guides to the legal profession
- i For internal communications to be highlighted as an area of good practice by Lexcel, following an independent audit of the firm involving interviews with randomly selected staff
- i To increase staff participation in firm events and initiatives
- i To increase staff awareness of firm values and encourage staff to put them into practice
- i To highlight and promote exceptional client service from staff

## Action

The research phase allowed us to see where we could make the most impact. We undertook the following activity:

- i **Breaking down barriers and having fun: Away Day**

To address the issues of staff feeling left out of the loop and not part of 'one firm' we organised an all-staff get together at Plymouth Aquarium.

The aims were to:

- o Encourage staff from different offices to get to know each other, so that long-term there would be greater co-operation and information sharing across the firm.
- o Provide an update on the firm's progress and plans for the future
- o Have fun!

Staff were split into groups and given tasks to complete together, such as a scavenger hunt, Dragons Den challenge or creating from recycled materials an ultimate Marine Predator or Racer. There were some presentations on the firm's

progress and future plans and the day was rounded off with a drum café where staff had a chance to try out their drumming skills!

**i Increasing visibility and creating dialogue: Managing Partner Roadshows**

To make the senior team more visible across the firm and ensure staff were given all of the information they wanted and needed about the firm's progress and future plans, a roadshow programme for the Managing Partner was devised. We used feedback from staff on the issues they wanted to know more about to help direct the content. This was very much a two-way process, with staff encouraged to give feedback, ask questions and get involved. Topics have included an update of the firm's progress, an overview of the legal market and local changes as well as client service and financial performance. The events have been well attended and well received by staff. An increased willingness to get involved and ask questions is a good sign of improved engagement by staff.

**i Information sharing: Base Camp & The Summit**

Staff felt like they did not know what was going on in the firm and that partners were not always sharing news with them. To tackle this we introduced two new communications channels. *Base Camp*, which is an ad hoc all staff email from Managing Partner Robert Camp, as issues arise. This is used for time sensitive announcements like financial results, information about the firm's performance against targets and news about staff bonuses. This is complemented with a regular monthly email from Robert Camp, called *The Summit*. It comes out once a month and updates staff on the big stories affecting the firm, good news like client wins, examples of excellent client service, a fun profile on a member of staff and social news from each office, to increase the feeling of 'one team' across the firm.

**i Getting better at saying thank you: Positive Postcards**

One of the key issues affecting staff morale was the feeling that they were not being recognised and thanked for their hard work. To help encourage a culture where we thank colleagues properly for their help and contribution we introduced new fun 'positive postcards', with slogans including 'You Rock', 'Top Banana', 'Wow' and of course that good old Westcountry affirmation 'Proper Job'!. Staff were encouraged to be part of this process by suggesting designs and sayings and then voting for the slogans they wanted us to use. This simple idea really took off, with staff eager to send postcards to colleagues and proudly displaying any they received.

**i Getting staff involved: Client Service Action Groups**

To help staff have more ownership of the firm and the changes we need to make to improve our service to clients, we have set up a client service action group for each office, which is made up of a group of volunteers from a range of roles across the firm. The groups have been tasked with finding ways of improving client service and ensuring ideas from colleagues are shared with the board and acted on. Some of the new initiatives that have already been put in place are new uniforms for staff in reception and at events, the introduction of a welcome to your new home card from the residential property team and better use of on-line calendars and voicemail.

i **Recognising achievement and bringing the firm values to life: Scownie client service award**

We have launched a new staff award to recognise excellent client service and staff who demonstrate the firm values of: being friendly, dynamic, commercial, supportive, reliable, demonstrating integrity and going the extra mile. The Scownie Award is open to everyone in the firm. Each quarter a winner is picked from each office's client service action group, and once a year an overall winner will be voted for by all staff.

i **Information sharing and getting to know colleagues: Lunchbox**


To help share information between teams and increase the profile of staff in different offices a new programme of 'Lunchbox' information sharing sessions has been set up. This sees staff meeting over lunch and hearing from different teams in the business. This has been well received with the presenting teams feeling that their profile has been raised and receiving more referrals from clients of other teams.

## **Post-campaign research**

We repeated the research activity undertaken at the start of the campaign.

## **Outcomes**

In all measures, we have exceeded our targets:

- i   
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- i The focus groups after the campaign showed positive change and more of a one-firm feeling. Staff felt that they were more aware of what was happening in the firm and its future plans, and that senior staff were more approachable. The fact that so many of the ideas suggested by staff were implemented was appreciated.
- i Lexcel audit, which includes interviews with randomly selected staff across each office, highlighted internal communications as an area of good practice. The audit showed that staff reported that internal communications had improved and were now considered to be good. The audit also mentioned the firm away day and regular communications from the Managing Partner and Board and said that 'the firm goes to quite some lengths to ensure staff are informed and engaged in the business direction and plans, and so that they understand their contribution.'
- i We increased our rankings in independent legal guides. This is important as they use feedback from clients to rank the firm:
  - o Chambers has ranked Stephens Scown in 12 disciplines, an increase on previous years, with top rankings in five legal areas. In addition 17 staff members, more than ever before, have been named as 'leading individuals'.

- Legal 500 describes Stephens Scown as ‘a leading presence in the region’. The firm’s family team gained top ranking and the agriculture and estates, debt recovery and property litigation teams have also continued to climb the rankings.
- The Lex 100 guide for 2012/13, has given us a ranking of 96.9% and placed us at number 5 of the top 20 friendliest firms in England and Wales, which is particularly pleasing as friendliness is one of our firm values. We have also received a total of five ‘Lex Medals’ – the highest number for any firm in Devon or Cornwall. As well as friendliness, the firm was awarded Lex Medals for social life, work/life balance, client contact and levels of stress.
- i Staff are much more engaged, getting involved with new initiatives and suggesting new ideas. Just two examples include the number of volunteers we have received for the client service action groups and the suggestions for the positive postcard initiative.

## **Resources**

- i Budget: £11,000
- i Team: The core team was our Marketing Director, Communications Executive and HR Director, supported by the firm’s Managing Partner and three heads of office

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