

RUPERT HAWKE LEGAL

HAVE A VISION

From my experience, most people working in an organisation really want to know where their business is heading and how it intends to get there. Openness is key and allows for input from across the firm. Keeping staff updated boosts morale too by providing an open and informed culture. Ensure your staff feel part of something.

A vision demonstrates to internal (and possibly external) stakeholders what the business is working to achieve. It might be that financial visions (essentially targets) are kept within management and the Board but there should be non-tangible visions that can be openly shared. The creation should be led by the MD with support from the Board. However it is helpful to get input from staff as to what they think the vision should be otherwise it might be seen as a 'management gimmick'. And it is important that the vision is 'real' and something being aimed for. Profit has to be the number one priority but it is created through working towards the vision.

CASE STUDY

Defining a Vision

This is an example of a Vision Statement I was involved in creating. It was assembled by a group of senior people in different positions with an agreed emphasis on people – what any law firm is all about. It is simple and something that can be communicated and promoted internally and externally. If adhered to, a good vision will develop the behaviours and framework for success.

We came up with 4 factors within our Vision Statement:

- To provide a **FANTASTIC SERVICE** to all our Clients
- To provide **OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL** our staff
- To be **PROUD TO WORK** for our firm
- To provide a **GREAT WORKING ENVIRONMENT** for everyone

We felt if we could get this vision understood and adopted across the business then we would be in a good place. As a leader you should promote your firms vision – constantly highlighting it and setting strategy in line with it.

I toured the firm to present our vision (along as sharing some general financial forecasts). I also ensured that I explained it to all new staff at inductions. Reminders were put on the walls and it was heavily promoted.

My message on each point was consistent and relevant to everyone is the business – critical if you are going to 'sell' your vision to your people:

FANTASTIC SERVICE: This highlights our aim to offer the best client experience and be known for that throughout the industry. The phrase 'Every customer has a thousand friends' is one to remember. It is important to instil the culture to create this. Setting expected standards, training and systems play a big part too. Peer pressure can also be a good way to raise standards of client care too. By rewarding high standards and illustrating that good service is recognised it tends to raise standards across the board.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL: The days of being 'made up' to partner are numbered due to changing nature of law firms. Conventional Limited companies are more common set-ups especially with smaller firms being swallowed up by larger organisations. Ambitious lawyers have limited options compared to a generation ago and indeed often have less appetite for equity in an uncertain world. But there needs to be opportunity for all and ideally examples of people who have risen through the business based on hard work and added value. At all staff inductions I always emphasis that opportunity exists for those who have the motivation and provide real examples of people who took that opportunity. Keep your eye on those who perform well and demonstrate the firm culture – they are the ones who deserve the chance. And consider ways of providing opportunity. If partnership is not a longer term option then bonus schemes based on performance can be a win-win. Some firms I know of have considered Employee share schemes that I'm sure would increase staff retention, morale, and efficiency.

PROUD TO WORK FOR THE FIRM: In many ways this is a self-generating vision that is set via the culture of the firm and develops accordingly. My message to staff was that this particular vision was owned by them. If they work well together and were successful in what they did then there was something to be very proud of. In that respect the vision was a target that everyone in the firm could deliver.

GREAT WORKING ENVIRONMENT – I have always felt that investment in pleasant office space, IT, furniture etc is worthwhile since staff see it as an investment in them. But my real vision of a great working environment was based on the concept of teamwork. Helping, supporting, advising, and mentoring. Hence this vision was to develop synergies throughout the firm that add value in terms of morale, performance, efficiency and of course bottom line returns.