



***“If you don’t drive your business, you will be driven out of business”*** – BC Forbes, journalist, and publisher (1915)

Since sending our bulletin last week - COVID 19 and Law Firms: Delivering Change as a Leader <https://peterscottconsult.co.uk/briefings/ChangeJune2020.pdf>, Paul Browne and I have been asked by a number of law firm leaders if there are any effective but straightforward processes they can use during this COVID-19 crisis to make necessary changes happen **NOW**?

Paul and I have suggested the following approaches which can be used to successfully achieve change, using processes we have facilitated in law firms before.

Law firm leaders will usually know what needs to be changed, but it is not only the leadership of a firm which must have that ambition. All (or most) other partners must also share that ambition and actively support it. Passive, folded arms spectators are not enough. The key is involving them in building the change – as opposed to having change “done to them”.

Instead of waiting for your next partner retreat, make effective use of any downtime brought about by COVID-19, and divide up your partners now into groups each of say five or six partners and organise a **virtual break-out session** to get the partner groups ‘brainstorming’ the following question -

***What needs to be changed in our Firm?***

and ask them to list in order of priority no more than **six issues** that will need to be tackled if your firm is to achieve its ambitions and objectives.

Each time we facilitate such an exercise, partners come up with essentially their same six issues – they know what needs to be changed and this process can provide them with the mechanism to enable them in a group context to freely express themselves, without individuals feeling threatened.

And the real benefit of doing this is that once there is a **declared consensus** within a partnership that certain changes need to happen, it will be easier to implement those changes because if partners believe they have themselves originated the ideas, then they are likely to be more willing to agree to changes which implement those ideas.

Adopting this approach should help you to identify what form the changes should take, the objectives of the changes and a vision built around those changes that describes a better future.

On the other hand, if you are presently planning a partner retreat (when government regulations permit) it may be useful beforehand to carry out a **confidential and independent partner questionnaire** to try to really understand your partners' attitudes and appetite for change.

We always suggest using a confidential partner questionnaire because otherwise partners are unlikely to say what they really think. Ideally responses should be provided to an independent third party who undertakes not to disclose 'who has said what'. Only if managed on that basis will partners be completely open and frank.

We recommend finding out the internal attitudes to change within a firm, because often fear of change on the part of those within a firm can be the greatest hurdle to achieving change. It is also useful to identify the key influencers- the people turn to for wise, impartial advice- and invest time persuading them so that they are supportive. Understanding and addressing hopes and fears, and having strong communication skills and powers of persuasion, are likely to be needed to convey the message that (as at present due to the crisis caused by COVID-19) **there is no alternative but to change**.

To quote from one of the most useful books on change we have read, (*"A survival guide to the stress of organisational change"*, Price Pritchett & Ron Pound, Pritchett & Associates, Inc.) -

*"The organisation is going to change – it must – if it is to survive and prosper. Rather than banging your head against the wall of hard reality and bruising your spirit, invest your energy in making quick adjustments. Turn when the organisation turns. Practice instant alignment"*.

Progress will not happen on its own. Instead, change must be led- and building the consensus for change is key.

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