

MAY 2020

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## COLUMNIST

*Alan Barrett at TWM on  
what it took to get staff to  
vacate the office*



## BAND PROFILE

*Ed Turner at Taylor Vinters  
talks law firm band Dirty  
Rumour, and culture*

# Are you OK?

*SME law firms are seeing the bigger picture when it comes to mental  
health and wellbeing at work*

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# WELCOME

## About us



**Kayli Olson** is LPM's editor. She spends most of her time in the UK picking up British slang and playing boardgames. [kaylio@lpmmag.co.uk](mailto:kaylio@lpmmag.co.uk)



**Jem Sandhu** is features writer for LPM. She discovers stories and advocates for professional grammar. [jems@lpmmag.co.uk](mailto:jems@lpmmag.co.uk)



**Josh Adcock** is LPM's staff writer. He jumps to it on everything from interviews to production. [josh@lpmmag.co.uk](mailto:josh@lpmmag.co.uk)



**Emily Nash** is head of client services for LPM. Get in touch with her for all things LPM: [emilyn@lpmmag.co.uk](mailto:emilyn@lpmmag.co.uk)

This month may see certain communities get back to work out in the 'real world'. Although, work itself has definitely seen a change of face – yes, as a new era of behaviour, technology and culture is birthed, we must not let this new environment regress back to a past life.

This issue of LPM focuses on a new mindset – no, not the homeworking behaviour we've adapted to, though that does play a role – it's mental health and wellbeing. I talk to SME law firms about how they've been able to manage staff wellbeing over the years, and how Covid-19 has changed mental health in the sector. Read up from p16.

Join Taylor Vinters' gig on p22 as managing partner Ed Turner talks the firm's band, Dirty Rumour, and the surprising part it has played in representing and supporting the firm's culture during lockdown.

Also in this issue, LPM asks Marie-Claire Byrne, head of business development at Davis Woolfe, about the firm's decision to use pronouns in email signatures (p5).

I also wanted to say a big thank you to everyone who sent me their kind words of support about LPM's digital journey. If you haven't already, check out the blog roll on our website for more up-to-date advice and opinions from others in legal practice management: [www.lpmmag.co.uk/lpm-blog](http://www.lpmmag.co.uk/lpm-blog).

Kayli Olson, editor  
@LPMmag | [kaylio@lpmmag.co.uk](mailto:kaylio@lpmmag.co.uk)



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# PRONOUNED UNDERSTANDING

Marie-Claire Byrne, head of business development at Davis Woolfe, talks about using pronouns in email signatures and fostering a diverse and supportive culture

**Q** What prompted including pronouns in email signatures?

**A** The managing partner, Guy Davis, and I met Rachel Reese from Global Butterflies after being introduced by Interlaw founder Daniel Winterfeldt. Not only did she inspire us to make changes, however big or small, but she also showed us that we're in a great position to be allies. It makes absolutely no difference to us but can make all the difference to someone else. It's that simple.

**Q** What messaging will you use to roll it out?

**A** We're relaunching the firm in a few months: new website, branding and mission. Unfortunately, recruitment has stalled in the meantime, but we'll be insisting that new starters all have their pronouns on their signature, but not without explaining why – we're planning on getting Rachel to do a talk for the team. She started Global Butterflies to bring awareness of trans and non-binary issues to the business sector – and it's something we would like to champion.

**Q** Why is it important for the firm to show support in this way?

**A** We want to lead not follow – we're happy to show our alliance in this small gesture. Something that we may not think twice about may mean a whole lot more to someone we're communicating with, whether we realise it or not.

**Q** What has been the reaction from external people?

**A** Not many people have noticed so far, but the ones who have have been really positive. It makes you remember that something so simple speaks volumes! We did this of our own accord as something we wanted our firm to support, when someone from our branding agency found out, they thought it was a great idea: "By the way Marie-Claire, I've just notice that you have your preferred pronouns in your signature – what a brilliant, simple and considerate thing to do, it's so on brand."

**Q** What does the firm do around diversity and inclusion already?

**A** I think the fact that we're an SME firm puts us in a great position to expand in the 'correct' way. We really put an emphasis on championing women (we're 80/20 women to men) and look to continue to employ from a socially mobile

and diverse spectrum. Guy Davis hired me on merit, for example. I didn't know the first thing about the legal sector! I decided to leave hospitality as I had been doing it for 20 years and needed a new challenge; I'm glad I made the move. Guy told me I could learn on the job – so the role adapted naturally as well as my own skillset. I was going to join the firm as a paralegal, but we quickly realised that different things needed addressing within the business and so now I'm head of business development. And I couldn't be happier. Hiring people from different backgrounds really does work to the firm's advantage – I have a totally different view on things as opposed to a solicitor, which is beneficial to growing the firm and our strategy. In terms of policies and targets, we're signatories of the Law Society's women in law pledge and its diversity and inclusion initiative. And we're really gung ho about hiring diversely – it's an absolute must and a no-brainer for us. We're hoping to grow three-fold in the next four years and want to reflect the cosmopolitan world in the face of our firm.

**Q** How does this play into the firm and its culture?

**A** Guy Davis started Davis Woolfe in June 2019. The team (then seven) left their previous firm as Guy recognised that they could provide a better service to clients in a more rewarding atmosphere if the focus of the business was solely on litigation. The firm now operates with three partners, four fee earners, and two people focusing on operations. Diversity is really important to the firm, and Guy has made sure that acceptance and support really lives within the firm. We recognise that divergent opinions contribute to social dynamism, and sharing insights leads to successful collaboration. Being in the legal, financial and tech centre of the UK, we recognise that innovation is not just about creativity, but also about interconnections and cross-fertilisation between trusted partners. We encourage our staff to develop their own strengths, as legal cases are not standardised static sculptures, they are unique adjustable designs that require a range of skills to solve. We're passionate about building a culture that celebrates, respects and values differences and want to create an inclusive workplace atmosphere from the ground up. **LPM**

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*First, get everyone working remotely and then rapidly understand, recommend and implement new technologies to support them*

# Evacuation stations

ALAN BARRETT, HEAD OF IT

In my first column I wrote about how I ended up working in IT and the idea was that my next column would be what future technologies were going to change the world just like the internet has. Unfortunately, something else happened: Covid-19. And here at TWM, I reached for the disaster recovery manual – which has been so carefully nurtured over the years – and checked under ‘P’ for pandemic. No, nothing in yours either? Don’t worry, we’re not alone – just about everyone else on the planet was unprepared for such a pandemic.

There I was thinking all the exciting stuff was behind me in IT – stable systems, high quality software and mature cybersecurity with aware users – when one of the biggest challenges of my career arrived.

Let’s face it, good IT becomes almost invisible to the user, only seen when something doesn’t work, and I actually consider it a real compliment if people don’t notice the system – even though takes so much effort to upkeep – as it means we’re doing something right! However, now IT wasn’t going to be invisible, it was going to be thrust front and centre stage.

The situation in Italy and Spain had given us some forewarning of what was coming and gave us a valuable week’s head start in what I’m now calling the ‘evacuation of Dunkirk’ at TWM as we raced to get almost the entire firm working from home. My thoughts were to split the problem in two: first, get everyone working remotely and then rapidly understand, recommend and implement new technologies to support them.

The first part involved sourcing and

configuring as many laptops as possible, then shipping them where needed – involving rapid online purchasing before stocks ran out (everyone had the same idea), including a mercy dash to PC World with my credit card. IT took over the boardroom and at one point had nearly 40 laptops being configured; this was confidently managed by a new hire who supervised willing non-IT volunteers. Alongside this we had a quick liaison with the department heads, and nominated a supervisor to allocate laptops or repurpose home machines. We managed to get nearly everyone ready for the lockdown within four days.

Come lockdown, we were well placed – albeit with a fair bit of tuning needed. And although the lack of ability to print caused some a problem (I know!), fortunately we have a strong culture of flexibility and homeworking and our technology only needs low bandwidth.

I then re-engaged with departments to understand post-evacuation problems. Video conferencing seemed, and still seems, to be the main problem as there are so many flavours out there and we still haven’t settled on one, but as long as we can securely speak to clients, contacts and the courts there’s a solution.

So, having helped engineer this massive change in the way the business works, what does the future look like? Well perhaps one of higher trust in employees to work flexibly, a greater emphasis on the importance of IT not only in the business but in society in general and a willingness to try new technologies and break old habits.

One final thought: a big thanks to the official and unofficial IT team. **LPM**

## LPM FIRM FACTS

**TWM Solicitors**

**Revenue: £17.4m**

**Corporate status: LLP**

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*Neglecting employee wellbeing can lead to poor mental health, lack of motivation and, ultimately, diminished performance*

# Tech check-up

SCOTT BROWN, THE MEDIA MASTER

The legal profession is notorious for the long and often stressful working days required to achieve a desired outcome for clients. However, at a time when awareness of mental health, wellbeing and mindfulness within the workplace are on the rise, firms must pause and think about what they're doing to support their team and promote wellness at work. Studies have shown that ignoring employee wellbeing can be hugely detrimental to law firms; neglecting it can lead to poor mental health, lack of motivation and, ultimately, diminished performance.

Assessing your firm's internal communications is always a good place to start when looking at how to create a healthy working environment. Everyday workload is enough for people to deal with – adding internal communication issues into the mix can quickly interfere with client cases.

Integrating an efficient intranet portal is one of the best ways to combat miscommunication. Your firm's intranet could act as a one-stop-shop where teams can collaborate on projects and receive useful information regarding the company. By implementing an effective communication channel in your firm, you're engaging your employees with the firm's goals and creating a less confusing and stressful working environment. This, in turn, will lead to better service to clients.

Listening to client needs is also a way to increase wellness. Clients expect firms to provide a high level of service – this includes fast communication and transparency. If it isn't satisfactory, the client may take their frustration out on whoever they're dealing with and this can lead to stressful interactions for your workforce. Focus on improving the overall service given to clients by investing in client-facing technology, such as mobile apps. These apps can use your firm's practice management system (PMS) to create a data-driven environment, act as a tool to engage with

clients directly by updating them on their case in real time, and create an agile working environment for your firm. Recently, providing an agile working environment in particular has come to the forefront. A pandemic was surely not on any law firm's business continuity plan. Being faced with having to close offices, firms risk losing new and ongoing work – which can create panic in the workplace.

Firms must provide the required support to ensure there's a smooth transition during this time and create a level of normality for teams. New innovative packages that help your firm continue with new client onboarding can be easily integrated with your firm's work processes. Key features of these technologies include integrating your firm's website with online forms that can take a client's core details and transfer them directly into your PMS. Other tools ensure secure interaction with clients through Skype for Business (now Teams). These are great digital solutions for firms experiencing uncertainty, as they can also facilitate secure payment portals to ensure a stable and reliable cashflow.

We've seen first-hand how stress within a firm could be attributed to the lack of automation within the workplace. Without effective automation in admin and operations, fee earners are sometimes left spending countless days in the office completing tasks that could have been done automatically, in hours, using remote settings with the correct system in place. Also, consider the range of automated pdf forms, which are available for legal services such as family law and probate. These forms streamline workflow and integrate with your PMS, easing fee earner workload and making for a more efficient workplace and healthier workforce. It's clear that a joined-up approach to IT is one of the best routes your firm can take to reduce workplace stress. Apply it to the correct areas of your firm and you will see a change for the better. **LPM**

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*While you must appropriately authorise and supervise the withdrawal of client funds, the rules do not specify the request for withdrawal be signed*

# Sticking to the rules

KATE ARNOTT, THE NUMBER CRUNCHER

In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, law firms might find it challenging to comply with the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) Accounts Rules. While the SRA recognises these are exceptional circumstances and will take a pragmatic and proportionate approach to enforcement, they still expect full compliance.

Here are some practical solutions to the most common issues firms might face:

**Difficulty banking a client cheque** – The rules require that client money be paid promptly into a client account. If that's not possible due to Covid-19, you must inform your client and establish whether funds can be paid electronically. If not, document why the money can't be banked promptly as the SRA will consider mitigating circumstances.

**Delay submitting an accountants report** – It might be possible for SRA audit staff to access internal accounts systems and, with permission, collate the data required. Alternatively, documents could be emailed, or uploaded onto a secure platform. If this is not feasible, the SRA has indicated they are unlikely to take action if a report is delayed. However, notify them before the submission date, with reasons for the delay and documentation of actions taken.

**Posting transactions in a timely manner** – Safeguarding and protecting client money is paramount. If you are unable to update ledgers when money is received and paid out, you should formulate an alternative arrangement. This could involve appointing a 'gatekeeper' of client money who monitors the client account regularly to ensure money paid out doesn't exceed the amount held for each client. This can be achieved by:

- Printing a matter listing at the specific date
- Recording any money received next to each matter
- Noting the combined balance of the above

- Ensuring sufficient funds are held before payments are made.

Keep documentation in chronological order and post it as soon as possible.

**Delaying the five-week deadline for reconciliation statements** – If, due to the absence of key staff, a reconciliation cannot be carried out, firms should have a contingency in place to enable any differences to be highlighted and investigated by the compliance officer for finance and administration or by a manager. In the absence or failure of a contingency, the SRA recommends taking steps to ensure client money is being dealt with properly. These steps should be documented and followed up at the earliest opportunity.

**Authorising payments** – While you must appropriately authorise and supervise the withdrawal of client funds, the rules do not specify the request for withdrawal be signed. However, it's good practice to have a signed authority and an email will suffice. The payment from the bank will still need to be actioned by the appropriate person as per the firm's policies. Attach a copy of the ledger with the request to show sufficient funds are held for the client or third party.

**Difficulty processing payments** – If the accounts department is unable to process payments, we suggest that another responsible individual is given access to the banking facility. A complete audit trail should be kept and processes for checking that sufficient funds are held will still need to be adhered to before any payment is made.

MHA MacIntyre Hudson has legal bookkeepers, with experience using systems such as Insight Legal, LEAP, Proclaim and Quill, who can assist remotely to enable you to comply with the SRA Accounts Rules. We also have a podcast on SRA Accounts Rules compliance. [LPM](#)



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*Organisations that manage to think strategically about digital transformation will be best equipped to emerge from the crisis*



# Digital crisis?

NICK HAYNE, THE DATA MASTER

One of the few silver linings of this terrible crisis, to be filed alongside the newly expressed respects for the people who have emerged as key workers, is the emergence of a genuine form of digital transformation. Digital transformation has become imperative for organisations (large and small, across almost every sector) to undertake if they want to maintain as close to normal business operations as possible – remote or home-based working a couple of days a week is no longer a pipedream.

Already, there's talk of the shift to homeworking becoming embedded more permanently once employers take note of the fact that a saving in overheads is also accompanied by a rise in productivity.

The degree to which the changes we're currently seeing in digital provision become permanent in a post-crisis world remains to be seen – but the experience of many industries transformed by digital disrupters shows that once the digital genie is out of the bottle, it's extremely hard to put it back in.

Many employees in lockdown are getting used to the new future of work using collaboration and communication tools like Microsoft Teams. And the often repeated myth that it only takes 21 days for behaviour to change or for an individual to adopt a new habit has re-surfaced.

It originated in the 1960s when the best-selling book, *Psycho-Cybernetics* by plastic surgeon Maxwell Maltz, reported that it typically took a minimum 21 days for a patient to become accustomed to their new face or for an amputee to get used to the loss of a limb.

His theory has been misinterpreted ever since by self-help authors and used to motivate

people into making change by using the simple 21-day target, which seems achievable for almost anyone.

It might be regarded as a myth today, but there's truth in how quickly new habits can be learned, especially if, as with remote working with Teams, they deliver positive benefits. And most employees new to working with isolated colleagues are likely to be accustomed to using digital comms tools like Teams during the first phase of lockdown.

The longer the lockdown, the closer we get to the 66 days cited in a 2009 study by Phillippa Lally, a health psychology researcher, who found this was the average time taken for a habit to become ingrained. However, before anyone gets too excited at the prospect of changing behaviour quickly, it's important to note that the harder work the habit was, the longer it took for it to become second nature.

The key to adopting a new behaviour, like using Teams to collaborate and communicate with colleagues as if you shared an office, is to keep at it. Yes, it's a bit odd at the beginning and the way you talk when there are more than two people takes some getting used to, but it will smooth out.

So, before we look at specific areas of our society that seem set to be digitally transformed to the greatest and most permanent degree in my next column, there's one thought to take away from this one ...

Despite all the other challenges, organisations that manage to think strategically about the digital transformation that's currently forced upon them, and how it can be integrated on a permanent basis into their operations in a useful manner, will be best equipped to emerge from the crisis and move forwards optimistically. **LPM**

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FEATURES INDEX

# BLOOMING BEHAVIOURS

## 16 FEATURE

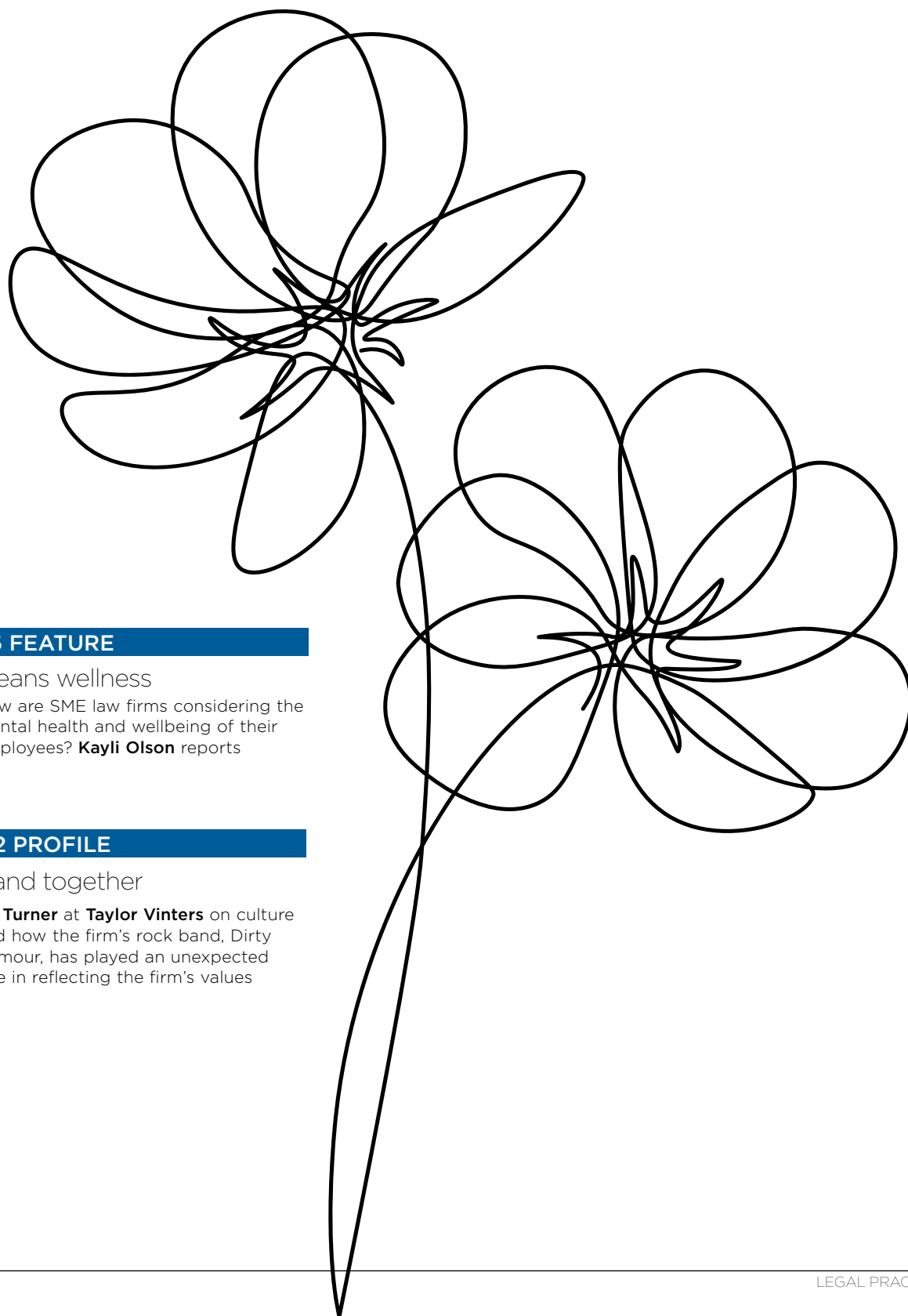
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How are SME law firms considering the mental health and wellbeing of their employees? **Kayli Olson** reports

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### Band together

**Ed Turner** at **Taylor Vinters** on culture and how the firm's rock band, Dirty Rumour, has played an unexpected role in reflecting the firm's values





# Means wellness

What progress have SME law firms made in the mental health and wellbeing space, and what effect has the Covid-19 crisis had on engagement with staff around these issues? Kayli Olson reports

**P**ressure and stress are no strangers to the legal market. The sector being what it is, and has been for hundreds of years, it's not uncommon to have unrealistic hourly targets hanging over heads and prevalence of presenteeism peering over the shoulder.

"In general, as a sector, I don't think mental health and wellbeing are spoken about enough. When it is, I'm afraid it's sometimes more words than action; and unfortunately, there's still a great deal of stigma around it," says Joanna Kingston-Davies, group chief operating officer at Jackson Lees.

Barry Davies, practice director at DJM, echoes the sentiment: "Some things are quite unsympathetic. Legal is naturally a pressured environment, and that isn't going to change, but I think that mental health awareness is gaining some momentum – I'm hoping it'll become commonplace."

Antonia Shield, managing partner at BPE Solicitors, recalls her experience training and practicing at a big London firm 20 years ago. "There were loads of mental health issues that arose in that environment as a consequence of us just having to work so hard. And if you didn't have the resilience to cope, it was really frowned upon.

"You can't do three or four all-nighters and expect someone to come out of the other end functioning normally the week after."

She says obviously expectations like this in the legal sector have a profound effect on people's

health and wellbeing – but firms often turn a blind eye. "I won't let that happen to my staff. And I think, as a profession, we are moving relatively swiftly to realising that mental health needs to be taken seriously."

## WELL, WELL, WELL

Kingston-Davies says Jackson Lees makes a point of talking about mental health and wellbeing a lot. "We've created a very open culture where it's OK not to be OK. Our people feel very comfortable being open and honest about their wellbeing."

Jackson Lees holds development and discussion sessions aimed at helping people firstly understand and then articulate how they feel around their mental health. Training courses include overcoming anxiety and imposter syndrome, and a recent talk focused on menopause.

"And I frequently post very raw and honest blogs on Workplace, our internal social media platform. For me, vulnerable and authentic leadership is crucial; we can't underestimate the importance of leading by example," she adds.

Richard Clark, CEO at CFG Law, agrees that it has to be driven from the top. He also points out





that it can be easy for firms to fall back on simply providing staff with a helpline, but that “removes the responsibility” of the line manager.

“You have to look at leadership from the point of view that when people come to work, they come to work with the lives outside of work.”

Therefore, he says, leaders must find a balance of working with colleagues from a business but also personal perspective – and know when to refer them to other sources of help.

Shield says BPE has different layers of counselling services available as a first protocol, such as a confidential helpline run through the firm’s Bupa membership. But that’s not all: “We talk about it a lot. The HR manager knows who to look out for more closely, but also everyone in the firm feels they can talk to her, and they do. She’s not outsourced, she’s been with the firm for over 20 years, knows our business and staff; and she’s extremely approachable.”

Luckily, legal has seen the increase of sector-specific support on wellbeing that law firms can use to help staff. Davies at DJM says: “The difficulty with a firm our size is that we don’t

have a dedicated HR department, so a lot of it would fall to me as practice director.

“And as far as personal support was concerned, something I implemented when I became a mental health first aider was to also have a confidential help app as part of our life insurance policy for staff. But we’re also looking to have a designated member of each department to be trained.”

## BAND AIDS

Over the last two years, the legal sector has definitely seen an increase in trained staff in this area. Davies has previously written for LPM about his experience being mental health trained – you can find his lessons and advice in LPM November 2018. He pointed out then that firms should ask: “How prepared are managers to identify and, as best possible, support those experiencing poor mental health while at the same time being alert to their own state of mind? Those in senior positions are as likely to display symptoms of stress without realising it.”

Jackson Lees has 32 trained mental health first aiders, and 14 who were recently trained in trauma-focused psychological first aid. It also has an employee assistance programme, so people can access medical support or counselling as needed.

At CFG, there are three mental health first aiders. Clark says: “Anyone can access and speak to them independently of their official line manager or HR. I was a bit sceptical at first because I wondered if people would be willing to have confidential conversations with their colleagues. But it’s proved very effective.”

He says the firm started out by asking for volunteers. Initially two people stepped up, which was a good number for the size of the firm; but there was one individual they felt would be particularly good given their position in the firm and the respect they have from colleagues.

“We approached the individual and asked whether they felt it was something they’d be comfortable doing; they said yes. And are loving it, actually. As a business we think they’ll be a future leader and feel that it’s good development for them to understand the challenges that people have in their lives. Subsequently, they’ve just been promoted.”

## LPM FIRM FACTS

CFG Law

Revenue: £4.5m

Corporate status: Ltd (applying for ABS)

47 fee earners, 71 total staff

Offices: Cheadle, Manchester

## COVID-19 COMMS

Come 2020, law firm mental health and wellbeing plans are definitely being put to the test. It would be remiss not to mention how SME law firms have changed or adapted to provide support for their staff, enabling them to work from home but also to keep up morale.

Davies at DJM says the problem he's had to deal with as a law firm manager is managing everyone else's reactions to things. "People are naturally stressed and anxious about the future of their work, ability to do that work and security in the role.

"It's a fight or flight mentality. Times like these are when the subconscious may take control and hasten decision making. So, we need to get people to slow their brains, look at the bigger picture and take more control over their decisions."

He says that there were going to be quite difficult conversations to be had and he could see that it was obviously going to affect people's mental health.

"The big thing for me was communication. A time will come when people get sick and tired of my announcements but it's important to keep conversations going and communicate openly with staff. And we have to be good listeners on top of that.

"People have been very positive about the communications I've had," Davies adds. He knew that the adaptability of everyone was key and communication was the tool to get there.

Constant communication was a theme across all interviewees. Jackson Lees developed a comms plan to try to appeal to as many different people in varying situations as possible. The board sends out official daily updates – many of which were around keeping people's spirits up – and also take turns to write less formal daily blogs on Workplace, which have been crucial, says Kingston-Davies.

"I went into isolation on 23 March because my daughter was showing symptoms; I started blogging then. Some days I would talk about how lucky I felt and how nice it was that the sun was shining. But one day I said: 'I'll be honest, I've really struggled today and I'm finding this so hard. The reality of self-isolation and not leaving the house for days has really started to hit home;



*It's a fight or flight mentality. Times like these are when the subconscious may take control and hasten decision making*

Barry Davies, practice director, DJM

the lack of social interaction has got to me".

"And the comments from staff have been very warming – they've said thank you for normalising these feelings and have felt empowered to talk about their experiences hitting a brick wall themselves."

She says it's really cemented just how important it is for leadership to show vulnerability and honesty. And the board are putting in welfare calls to all of our people just to see how they're doing.

Davies at DJM, too, says he regularly checks in with people at the firm and has told department heads to do the same, not from a micromanagement point of view but just to make sure everyone is coping.

Clark at CFG speaks to around a dozen colleague a week himself, just to see how they're doing – the HR team is doing this as well.

"I know that not everyone is going to tell the chief exec if they're not doing that great, but I've had some good conversations anyway."

## DRINKING UP MORALE

It's surprising more people aren't virtual pub quizzed out by now, with the burst of virtual games and gatherings happening around the world; but it's a great way to keep spirits high during these times. In terms of direct engagement and morale boosting, Jackson Lees' social committee has organised loads of activities – from TikTok challenges to family games.

Luckily, BPE overhauled its intranet, called COLIN, last year. The firm set up chatrooms on COLIN for mums and dads, parents with children under five, pet owners, and so on.

## LPM FIRM FACTS

Jackson Lees

Revenue: £11.8m

Corporate status: Ltd

135 fee earners, 280 total staff

Offices: Liverpool, Manchester, Hoylake, Birkenhead, Heswall

## LPM FIRM FACTS

Douglas-Jones Mercer

Revenue: £4.5m

Corporate status: Ltd

30 fee earners, 55 total staff

Offices: Swansea, Mumbles, Porthcawl, Cardiff

## LPM FIRM FACTS

BPE Solicitors

Revenue: £9.5m

Corporate status: LLP

132 total staff

Offices: Cheltenham, Bristol, London



The firm has been doing quizzes online, says Shield, but people also chat on Whatsapp about funny stories or send memes.

"Obviously, there's a fine line between what's appropriate and what's not. And this particular crisis is definitely pushing the boundaries. But it has been a great way to keep morale up and for people to let off steam."

BPE does an update once a month with the entire firm over some drinks – it recently did that on Zoom. "Normally when I deliver that message, it's in the office and everyone grabs a drink. I always have to drive home afterward, so never drink any alcohol. But this time I was able to sit on Zoom with a good glass of wine – and everyone commented on it. It was a strange experience but so great to do and there will be more!"

The firm has a relatively relaxed environment most of the time, she adds, so it was fun to see people even more relaxed on Zoom. "It was nice to see people's families, pets and home lives come into the office in a way that they never used to; being able to just drop that guard down is a great way to bond during these unprecedented times."

### MINDFUL MAPPING

It's no doubt that after lockdown firms will come out as new entities, with different goals, technologies and ways of working. And how you measure time, bill hours, and set targets will surely get a push in a new direction too.

Clark at CFG agrees with sentiments voiced at the top of this piece that an emphasis on time recording is a big piece of pressure for many people. "We don't target people in that way. We talk about people doing the work that's necessary on the cases to delivering great outcomes for the client. We get our chargeable time through that approach."

Davies at DJM has written for LPM in the past about finding the people aspect of setting KPIs in LPM June 2019; he said at the time, and this definitely rings true now: "At a time when it is reported that two-thirds of the legal profession are experiencing stress, we should not ignore wellbeing KPIs as part of the embedded culture of any firm."

Having an emphasis on data and numbers is good when it comes to financial management and strategy but bad when it comes to people management. Setting unrealistic targets will, ultimately, negatively impact staff wellbeing, and culture, and isn't necessary to run a modern and successful law firm.

Shield at BPE agrees: "What's important for me is to forecast, see what new instructions there are and understand what and when people think they're going to bill. That visibility will be especially important in the coming months."

"It's really not too different to how I approach forecasting procedure normally, except that I'll be a little more forensic so we can try to anticipate what future cashflow will look like."

Being profitable is important, but billable targets are not the be-all and end-all, Clark says, which reflects that CFG lives the values it sets out as a business, together.

CFG was recently accredited with the Investors in People (IIP) gold standard and awarded its new Health and Wellbeing standard, in spite of everything happening with Covid-19. IIP sent a survey round asking people about the firm's vision, if they understood their position, felt supported and so on (that got a response rate of 90%).

"To achieve the gold standard on our first go at the accreditation is a huge achievement, putting us in the top 18% of companies. There is the platinum category above us at 2% of companies, and we now have an action plan in place for how we can attain this in the next year."

"Having a completely independent and external assessment of the firm is a great eye opener – and for us it's always about continuous improvement," says Clark.

Continuous improvement doesn't just apply to technology and new ways of working, it applies to your people and their wellbeing. So, what's in the future for mental health and wellbeing at SME law firms? That's in the hands of firm leaders, and their ability to empower staff, be flexible, honest and understanding. **LPM**

## A NEW WAY TO MAKE A LIVIN'

How are SME law firms working from home, and being mindful about it in the process? Our feature interviewees elaborate

Shield at BPE says a big part of managing people is about making sure staff know that they don't have to be a superhero in these situations. "All we can do is our best; we have to cut ourselves some slack.

"For a manager, it's about understanding that everyone's home life and responsibilities differ. You need to be perceptive to how much people have on their plates."

Kingston-Davies at Jackson Lees agrees: "We've always tried to promote flexible and agile working. The messaging to people needs to be that we want to give them the freedom to do what they can, when they can. To a degree, it doesn't matter, as long as teams work together to ensure the client's needs are met.

"We don't expect people to be Superwoman or Superman – managing young children at home at the same time as work is hard. And when we trust our people to organise their time as best they can to fit in with family, the results are better all round."

Davies at DJM says it's important to make sure people take breaks and know that they can deal with whatever family or home responsibilities that arise in the day.

"We don't expect people to strictly work nine to five. Because of our systems, I can see when someone is dialled in, connected to the server and so on. The challenge I'm coming across now is telling people that they need to take breaks.

"I've found it myself; my commute is now about 30 seconds. I'm lucky enough to have a converted-shed office in my garden. Others are not so lucky and will have other challenges with workspace. It's a huge mental adjustment for us all. Personally, I'm finding that I sometimes work later or forget to take a lunch break. I have to remind myself that it's not good for my overall health."

Shield says part of BPE's solution to this was to create a remote working guide. "This may not keep morale up, but I've been very honest about how I have found adjusting to working from home quite tricky at times.

"Even the little things like taking the dog out for walks and getting a bit of exercise and fresh air – things I've never been renowned for doing but I think have been important from a leadership perspective to show that it's ok to go out and do these things."

Part of helping people to feel comfortable in their new work environments is perhaps to give them some familiarity. Clark says CFG provided everyone with the equipment and full network access needed to do their jobs. "Pretty much every person has had an office chair delivered to their home, along with screens for some.

"We haven't chosen anyone's work hours. And since being in lockdown, we've had our most productive weeks of the year in terms of time recording and cases settled."

Every Sunday Clark, with the help of his daughter, films a two-minute video blog to update the firm. And



*The messaging to people needs to be that we want to give them the freedom to do what they can, when they can*

Joanna Kingston-Davies, group chief operating officer,  
Jackson Lees

whenever there has been a significant government announcement around lockdown, he puts up video blogs around that as well.

The communication theme comes back around here too not just for mental health check-ins but for company comms, perhaps more so than usual. Clark says: "I went out with a very clear statement that, as an employer, we will not furlough anyone, we will not make any redundancies, and we will not be reducing salaries."

In fact, while in lockdown CFG has recruited three new senior colleagues: two partners and one head of IT, joining in June, July and September. A new associate was pre-inducted and will be training digitally.

This is, of course, a bit of an anomaly – though a fortunate one at that. Many SME law firms have not had the ability to retain all staff and have had to make the hard decisions to furlough or let people go.

Jackson Lees, for example, has furloughed 33% of staff, which is about 90 people – a combination of operations and support staff (as day-to-day requirements have shrunk) and legal teams in certain practice areas or based on workload. Kingston-Davies says the firm has done a huge amount to stay in touch with its furloughed staff, ranging from coffee mornings to learning and development initiatives. Luckily, the response and support has been overwhelming and incredibly humbling, she adds.

"It was a really tough decision to furlough but ultimately it's about protecting cashflow, and therefore jobs, for the medium and long-term. We asked heads of department to make recommendations based upon productivity and capacity levels and we, as leadership, endorsed those 100%."

Generally, across the legal sector, residential property has been hit by the pandemic more than other areas (LPM June will be covering conveyancing as a hot topic area, so stay tuned). Sadly for our communities, areas such as family law and care work have been very busy, Kingston-Davies adds.

There is a silver lining: all interviewees agree, this pandemic will change how work is done forever – they're looking at lessons from Covid-19 and how it will change their businesses coming out of lockdown, for the better. **LPM**



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# Band together

Ed Turner, managing partner at Taylor Vinters, on the importance of a collective purpose and culture, especially in times of crisis, and how the firm's rock band, Dirty Rumour, has played an unexpected role in reflecting the firm's values

Just as the virus was starting to slowly make the headlines, managing partner Ed Turner, together with his other colleague-bandmates, were headlining the Taylor Vinters' Oxford office launch party as Dirty Rumour.

"Looking back now, playing together in Oxford – the first time in front of clients and the last time in front of an audience before everything was locked down – really was a good way of showing people what Taylor Vinters is all about, what our personality is, if you like," says Turner, drummer for the band.

Dirty Rumour started when a new partner, an enthusiastic guitarist, joined six years ago. "When he came along, we were still really putting our heads together to figure out who we were as a business. We knew we were passionate and wanted to innovate and do things differently from the status quo – and I

think us starting a rock band was actually a natural reflection of that culture."

Turner adds that this was an authentic decision, and not just a half-hearted attempt to 'fit the mould' of a progressive company.

"Authenticity is key to cultivating a positive culture. At Taylor Vinters, we want to support our people – we believe in building a 'tribe' so that different personalities and passions can drive our decisions and inform our company culture, rather than a preordained strategy telling people who they should be and what sort of culture they should aspire to. We want each individual to feel included and empowered enough to bring their whole selves to work, which in turn informs our culture, and our success."

It's this support of individuals' goals and personalities that Turner believes is crucial to creating a positive company culture. In the

From left to right: Mark Boon, bass, keys; Tom Anghileri, guitar, vocals; Alex Thornton-Reid, vocals, keys; Andrew Williamson, guitar, bass; Becky Woodcock, vocals; Ed Turner, drums



same way that Dirty Rumour brought some musically inspired colleagues together, the firm also supports its groups of passionate cyclists, runners, and avid readers, to name but a few.

"We're proud that there's such a diverse range of interests within the business – we really strongly advocate supporting the creative, non-legal energy within the firm. We believe this will ultimately build a more well-rounded and capable team to work with our clients, innovators and entrepreneurs from all walks of life."

On average, over the year, Dirty Rumour practises once every couple of weeks – maybe two or three times a week in the run-up to a gig. The band has notably played at Law Rocks five times, including once being crowned a joint winner. In the light of Covid-19, the band has had to adapt.

"It's really interesting to see, in this new age of Covid-19, how everything that brought us together in the first place – the business's enthusiasm for, and support of, its people pursuing their passions and personal goals – has been able to continue in these difficult times. Instead of meeting in my studio to practice, we now meet virtually."

A CHANGE IN TEMPO

In the same way the band has had to adapt, so too has Taylor Vinters. Having already fully supported flexible working prior to the pandemic, moving towards full remote working at this time has felt like a natural step in the firm's journey, Turner explains.

"Suddenly having all of us working from home has definitely been a challenge, but one that we felt ready for. This new era has, in a way, just fast-forwarded our progress with agile working, which we have always supported. The way we are all working now will hopefully open up even more opportunities to support our employees and all their individual circumstances when this period is over, and we encourage this transformation."

It's now more important than ever before that shared purpose and culture motivates and inspires employees, even from a distance, Turner adds. Deciding your organisation's purpose is fundamental to long-term success, providing a guiding star in turbulent times, such as now.

"The key thing for our band, and the same for



*The key thing for our band, and the same for our business, is that we wanted to adapt. We didn't want the last time we played together to be months ago at our Oxford launch party*

our business, is that we wanted to adapt. We didn't want the last time we played together to be months ago at our Oxford launch party – though that was good! We wanted to make it work. It was important to us not just to play music on our own, but to play it together. It's the bond that existed in the band, and established before the Covid-19 crisis, that makes Dirty Rumour important to its members now. It motivates us to keep it going and I think the same can be said for the importance of a shared purpose and culture in law firms too."

It's hard to imagine how the business world will emerge the other side of the pandemic. But, Turner says, those with strong cultures and a willingness to invest time and energy to keep that culture strong in a fast changing context will emerge into the new post-Covid-19 paradigm positively, and they'll be able to take what they have learned from this period with them. Those without that glue will rush back to how it was before and find that it does not exist – the cohesion that 'normality' provided has been lost and they no longer have the glue to come together in a new context, he adds.

Aside from the world of work going through a significant amount of change, for which we can't fully predict the final outcome at the moment, there are also some clear certainties that will be true for almost everyone after this period is over, he says.

"I'm so grateful for the technology that's able to bring us together right now, but I can't wait to get together with all my bandmates, instruments raging, in my studio. Despite all of the positives that I genuinely believe can come from this time, nothing beats human face-to-face connection." **LPM**

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LPM FIRM FACTS

Taylor Vinters

Revenue: £20m

Corporate status: LLP (ABS)

116 fee earners, 178 total staff

Offices: London, Oxford, Cambridge, Singapore, New York

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# Legally able?

A recent report published in February 2020 by the Legal Services Board and the Law Society collected responses in the biggest legal needs survey ever run in England and Wales, uniquely measures the 'legal capability' of the public to seek out legal help. Under demographic analysis, it found that those with lower legal capability (measured in confidence, accessibility, self-efficacy and more) tend to: be women, be younger than 55, have a disability that limits daily life, or have lower household incomes (£32k or under). Considering how access to justice has been a hot topic in certain areas of law for some time, now may be a good time to review how accessible and transparent your firm is (considering any further difficulties brought on due to Covid-19).



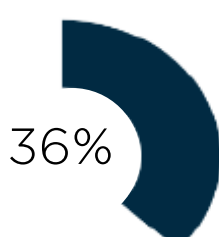
## LEVELS OF LOW LEGAL CAPABILITY

Low legal confidence



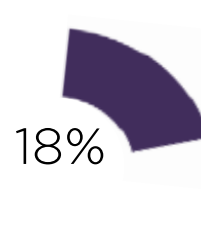
are unlikely to believe they can generally handle difficult situations in a legal context

Low accessibility of justice



think the justice system, excluding criminal justice, is not very accessible

Low self-efficacy



are unlikely to believe they can generally handle difficult situations in a legal context

Over a quarter (28%) score low in at least two out of three legal capability measures. It also found that people with low legal capability have worse journeys and outcomes when facing legal issues. These people:

- are less likely to understand rights and responsibilities
- find it harder to find information
- are more likely to try but fail to get help
- have worse outcomes and lower satisfaction.

Source: Reshaping legal services to meet people's needs: an analysis of legal capability published February 2020, survey by YouGov on behalf of the Legal Services Board and the Law Society



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