

Beverly Landais & Vince Plant

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Job titles

CEO
and Head of Clerking Services Devereux

Devereux Chambers covers the professional markets in insurance and reinsurance, employment law, tax, finance, sports, energy, telecommunications and education. It has a large and successful team advising and representing those engaged in cases involving personal injury, clinical negligence and health and safety and offers arbitration and mediation services.

Beverly, you have been the CEO at Devereux for nearly two years, prior to which you were Business Development & Marketing Director at Baker & McKenzie for 10 years. What attracted you to the Bar?

I am privileged to come to the Bar at a time of great change and tremendous opportunity as well as challenge. The bar is a highly competitive place with over 15,000 barristers vying for work. This is nearly twice as many in practice as twenty years ago. It is unlikely that there will be enough buyers to sustain a profession of this size in the current form. Change is inevitable and beyond our control: we can, however, control how we respond to it. It is clear that the Legal Services Act is a major accelerator for change and this will touch every aspect of the legal profession. Who knows what the future will hold but one thing is sure - the Bar must respond to the challenge of modernizing. The choice seems to me to be stark. Embrace the challenge or get left behind. I am fortunate to work with members and staff at chambers with the drive and insight to understand this.

What are some of the key initiatives you have introduced to chambers?

Devereux has always had a reputation for placing a strong emphasis on advocacy with a professional yet client friendly and pragmatic approach. This is a great starting position, as feedback from clients makes it clear that they place more emphasis than ever on the importance of these attributes. Relationships count, people instruct those they know, like and trust. We have become more systematic in seeking clients' feedback and investing the time to understand their goals. A top priority for me is listening to what clients want and sharing this understanding with members and staff, then ensuring follow up to deliver the things that really make a difference to enhancing the client relationship. To enable this I restructured the support staff to create a modern and efficient 'Business Services' function. I have also focused on encouraging a feedback culture internally. Last autumn I ran our first engagement survey which asked for members' views on a variety of topics. The take up was tremendous with rich and detailed feedback that provided a mandate for action. I presented the results to members together with a set of strategic priorities which were also shared with staff. The buy-in that this enabled has allowed me to drive forward knowing that I have the grass roots support to do so. I have also focused on crystallising the brand attributes that together, present a unique and powerful positioning which clients, members and staff can identify as "Devereux at its best". When I asked clients, members and staff what we are like 'at our best', four key values came up time and again. These are a) being focused on what really matters; b) being commercially astute; c) possessing excellence in depth and d) being easy to deal with. The challenge is to ensure that everything we do and say lives up to these values.

Vince, you joined chambers 10 months ago from Fountain Court: why and how have you restructured the clerks' room?

I was excited at the opportunity to join chambers whose members have the

vision to invest in the future. By the time I joined Beverly had completed a comprehensive refurbishment which created fantastic client facilities and modern office space for members, clerks and other staff. I was fortunate to inherit an excellent team of extremely talented clerks with a variety of skill sets. Their enthusiasm and keenness to embrace active practice management and to push up the level of client service as well as communication with members makes my job a real pleasure. Having restructured the clerks' room into practice management teams, and in the process promoting Glenn Billenness to Deputy Senior Clerk, I am concentrating on enabling practice managers to invest time in understanding more about the demands put on our clients, and looking at ways of supporting them in reaching their goals. The clerks' room now consists of 10 people, including myself. It is about having the right people who are working efficiently and focusing their efforts on doing things that add value to the business. Continuous improvement to the service we provide is top of my agenda and I have introduced client care and business development training to help deliver this.

What have been some of the recurring themes from barristers as to why they have wanted to join your chambers in recent years?

Laterals are attracted by chambers' welcoming and collegiate atmosphere coupled with a progressive approach to client care and practice management as well as the support of a well run, professional Business Services function. Devereux is home to some of the most experienced litigators at the Bar and, we are told, is extremely appealing to those who seek quality client relationships and interesting work that is professionally and personally fulfilling. ●

LPA Legal interviewed Beverly Landais and Vince Plant.