

## in conversation with... Beverly Landais and Vince Plant



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**It doesn't matter what the question is, for Beverly Landais and Vince Plant of Devereux Chambers the answer is always "client service". With a genuine desire to be their very best for every client all the time, and a willingness to invest in getting it right, it's no surprise that the team at Devereux were nominated for this year's Chambers & Partners Client Service Award.**

There are two kinds of client at Devereux - the internal client and the external client. What's more, there's a universally held belief that, whichever category you fall into, and whatever your role in that team, you deserve to be on the receiving end of the very best service the chambers is capable of delivering.

### **A structure that serves clients' interests**

The chambers' first ever CEO, Beverly joined in 2009 after 10 years at Baker & McKenzie. "The members were united around the need for the role," she says "and gave me a real mandate to carry out a modernisation process." Her first task was to design a support structure and processes that served clients' interests as well as those of staff. "Client service was high priority at an intuitive level but processes were missing. Members and staff had some great ideas on how it could work - so did clients. Everyone contributed."

One key move was creating the Head of Clerking Services role. "The clerking team needed a role model - someone with leadership qualities and a talent for building relationships." Vince joined in 2010. "I was attracted by the way they'd put business services on a modern footing," he says. "And by the very real focus on clients - everyone talks about client service, but it's central to our whole ethos, internally and externally."

"A team ethic is essential," says Beverly. "Everyone is important. Our barristers provide a tailored legal advice of the very highest quality. And the clerks have excellent knowledge of their practices. That means they can advise clients on which barristers will best suit their needs as well as on fee structures. While the clerk's room is the heartbeat of chambers, every member of staff plays a vital role in delivering a first rate client experience."

### **Training for client service**

Training plays a huge role and it starts - as everything does at Devereux - with what benefits the client. Informal sessions are run - for example barristers talk on hot topics - an open forum that may be of use to everyone or may have a more technical focus. Courses, such as the rolling training programme Vince introduced for his staff of 10, are also integral to client service. Members speak to the clerks about practice areas to give them a better understanding of their marketplaces, and Vince uses external trainers for team building.

"Change can be challenging but I found there was a terrific appetite for getting stuck in," he says. "And a real passion for delivering client focussed services. All that was needed was some coaching."

### **Branding and communications**

When Beverly arrived, the set already had a strong reputation for outstanding advocacy and a friendly down-to-earth approach, but was poorly supported with branding and marketing communications. A rebranding project began with input from clients, members and staff. "We wanted to discover the essence of what we are when we're performing at our best."

A refurbishment project was part of the rebrand. "When you provide tip top expertise you need to do it in tip top surroundings." And it is tip top. But it's also calm, unimposing and friendly. The décor was chosen not to represent the brand colours, but to make the client feel at ease. The building was organised to enhance communications. The clerks' room is open plan and, says Beverly, "has the buzz of a trading desk."

Now they are systematic in spotting opportunities for placing know-how articles, and run seminars and events that have a specific use for clients. The messages about their brand are reflected in everything from PR to fee notes.

### **Engaging the members**

A recent member engagement survey achieved 82% participation and elicited a real richness of feedback - an indication of how committed the barristers are to service improvement. "We drew out themes which we've used as a mandate for action," says Beverly. "We report to members regularly on where we are with what we set out to do."

Round table discussions take place between members to find out what's working and deal with any issues - again, this results in insightful ideas that the staff put to use in fine-tuning client service.

### **Knowing and serving the client**

Vince and Beverly often see clients and prospective clients together. That way the clients benefit from Beverly's ability to get to the heart of their aims, opportunities and issues, and from Vince's knowledge of the processes and individual members' ways of working and expertise. Practice Managers' input is often valuable at these meetings too.

"Strong relationships enable us to understand exactly what inspires each barrister and match that with a client's needs," says Beverly. "Then you get something extraordinary. You've found the most fulfilling work for the barrister and solved a difficult issue for a client. Your barrister performs at an exceptional level and your client gets Devereux at its best. You've made something special happen."

This client-centric approach is something solicitors clearly experience. One of many positive quotes in this year's Chambers directory says the team is "interested in wanting to know what we want rather than just content to sell their people to us."

"Clients deserve time spent outside the cut and thrust of cases," says Vince. "Client service review meetings help us tailor our service to what they want. The important thing is that we act on what we hear. We've never held a meeting that hasn't resulted in actions."

The team doesn't just solve issues relating to their relationship with the client. Beverly tells a story of how they held a review with a top law firm who were struggling with an internal communications issue. Devereux gave them some ideas on how they might resolve it and then helped them implement the changes.

### **Readiness to serve**

Devereux is a breath of fresh air - even the logo is an honest representation of what its people, culture and values are. The red represents the strength of the team relationship and legal expertise. The three roundels signify the trust that exists in the relationship between barrister, law firm and client. And the bar comes from the Devereux coat of arms and, in heraldic terms, means "readiness to serve".

**Devereux is one of the UK's top civil and commercial sets. Established over 60 years ago, the set is large enough to provide in-depth expertise at all levels and takes pride in providing a tailored approach to all its clients.**

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