

## Contents

- Performance Appraisals – a Two Way Street
- Emotional Intelligence
- Coaching – A New Form of Professional Mentoring
- The Best Deal
- Do you Need Eyes and Ears in the Marketplace?

Welcome to Crescent Legal's Spring Newsletter. During the early months of 2002 we have met with a number of candidates who are hoping to move or find career progression during the course of this year. Many are waiting for the outcome of their yearly appraisals and others are actively interviewing and seeking better rewards. For more details about Crescent and the way we work,

Visit Crescent's Website – [www.crescent-recruitment.co.uk](http://www.crescent-recruitment.co.uk)

As you will see, we have incorporated a "contact us" page so that you can reach us via Email.

### Performance appraisals – A two-way street!

Performance appraisals can be awkward experiences for employer and employee alike. If they are approached and dealt with creatively however, they can be motivational experiences.

Appraisals should:

- Provide an opportunity for the firm and the individual solicitor to discuss performance and mutual expectations.
- Let a solicitor know his or her strengths and areas that need improvement.
- Identify individuals who may function more effectively in a different role or need a role change.
- Identify the learning or professional growth needs of an individual.
- Identify solicitors with a potential for greater responsibility.
- Determine salary upgrades based on merit or results.

Unfortunately in some instances, partners or H.R. managers mis-use this opportunity and focus upon isolated incidents which have evoked displeasure and consequently reprimand or censure employees. Appraisals are henceforth perceived as 'control mechanisms' and a valuable opportunity is lost.

These problems may arise in any firm and may affect both the employee and manager during the appraisal process. A good firm however, will have developed and discussed performance criteria with the individual solicitor well in advance of the appraisal and so no unpleasant surprises should occur!

Solicitors do need to be aware of the pitfalls of human nature however and awareness may help to offset the more subjective and possibly unfair aspects of an appraisal:

- Do not let all aspects of your performance be based around a single positive or negative event. This may distort the scope of your achievements and misrepresent your true worth to the firm.
- One of the most commonly used devices is the 'contrast effect'. Some managers will evaluate solicitors relative to other colleagues rather than to actual working performance. This emphasises the need for a good individual job description which you can measure yourself by.
- Some managers give higher ratings to employees who are like themselves and lower ratings to those who aren't! Past performances may also influence current assessments unfairly – even though a great deal has happened in the interim.
- Some solicitors suffer from the 'recency effect' – where managers focus on only recent events and overlook past problems or accomplishments. This may be more common in firms where appraisals occur only once every 12 months.

Perhaps some Managers would benefit from reading recent research on

### Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence has its roots in the concepts of 'social intelligence'. This was first

identified by E.L. Thorndike in 1920. He states that this was 'the ability to understand and manage men and women.....and to act wisely in human relations'.

Interpersonal skills are part of the package we offer to employers – whether we are consciously aware of it or not. Employers assess us on our interpersonal skills in a work situation. These might include self awareness, skills in building and sustaining relationships, aptitude in dealing with colleagues and clients and the ability to motivate oneself.

Emotional Intelligence is hard to evaluate and cannot be easily quantified like other aspects of our professional performance.

Specialists tend to concur however, on the essentials. Emotional Intelligence will allow you to read the agenda BEHIND a person's words. It also confers the ability to discipline oneself and modulate emotions. Emotional Intelligence gives the ability to know when to apportion trust. It may furthermore give the ability to couch suggestions diplomatically. E.I. makes an individual empathetic to others and

enables one to see perspectives other than one's own. Experts also believe that E.I. enables a man or a woman to treat people as more rounded human beings.

A recent study monitoring a group of 100 British Managers also showed a strong correlation between rapid career progression and a combination of high emotional intelligence and high I.Q.

Conversely Managers with low E.I. tended to be overly independent, low in trust and empathy and high in aggression. This generated extremely high stress levels and corresponding staff turnover problems.

One popular solution for firms lacking in Emotional Intelligence is:

### Coaching – A new form of professional mentoring

Business and indeed personal coaching has become a 'boom industry' recently. Many businesses, firms and companies are recognising a need for outside help as commercial pressures often deny managers the time they need to spend developing their



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junior colleagues. Coaching is a combination of mentoring and training where coaches work with a company or a firm directly. Coaches typically meet face to face with their clients anywhere from once a month to once a week.

There are several types of coaches. One genre works specifically with company executives and owners to increase profits and stabilise the management team. Other coaches are involved with employees at all levels. Quite often they focus on the importance of establishing the life-work balance which is so important for many young solicitors.

Although executive coaches do not meet with every employee, their efforts can still make a difference among the entire staff. Pro-active attitudes in a successful business make for a more productive atmosphere.

Many business coaches set up a system of accountability and set tasks at each meeting which need to be addressed before the next session. During meetings the coach and client review the tasks set previously and check on the status of business goals and review other issues and opportunities arising.

Personal coaching differs from traditional therapeutic techniques and tends to focus upon empowering the individual. The theory is that when we perceive our self limiting behavioural patterns we can address them and effect changes. Some personal coaches have a background in psychotherapy but many migrate from professions such as business consulting or financial planning. A personal coach helps a client by encouraging him or her to set new goals and carry them out..

So, you were disappointed with your appraisal and your boss has low E.I.! You may decide to look at other career options. We find that many of our candidates looking for new positions are sometimes at a loss when they need to negotiate a salary package. We therefore feel that the following information may be useful in securing the best deal for yourself.

### The best deal

Many experts suggest that you should research market salaries and market demand for your position before you begin to negotiate. Some recruiters believe that a shortage of skills in the marketplace at the moment means that more

firms are making employment decisions based on personality as much as legal expertise so be aware of this at interview.

Be aware that new employers expect people to ask for more than they were previously earning and so unless unusual circumstances apply or you are deliberately down-shifting, never ask for less.

Timing is also a crucial factor and so think of the timing and importance of the things you want to negotiate. Are you prepared to wait for a few months until you have proved your worth – at which point you may agree to re-negotiate. You may also need to acknowledge that some things may not be negotiable. Pushing in inappropriate directions may cause friction and may block off more productive avenues.

Your ability to look at the whole package may also be an important factor. Some firms have their hands tied when it comes to salary or may have to face difficult 'internal politics' if your salary exceeded that of your peers and colleagues. Other benefits however, may bump up your overall remuneration to a figure that meets your expectations.

Your willingness to work towards a 'win-win' situation may also be crucial. Candidates who are perceived to be too self-interested may spoil a potential working relationship. Ideally you need to pick your way through the process without upsetting the individuals involved. You may not get all that you ask for but if a potential employer is prepared to make some concessions, 'win-win' becomes feasible.

Perhaps you need to know your limits thoroughly before you begin. Decide what is most important to you and what is optional. Decisiveness and clarity may help you to win the day.

### Do you need eyes and ears in the marketplace?

During the early part of this year, we have been contacted by a number of our candidates who simply want to 'test the water' at the moment. When we are contacted by solicitors, we do not automatically assume they they want to move

imminently. We are well aware of the different phases and thought processes associated with a decision to move and so we are happy to chat things through or simply talk about the state of the marketplace.

We can effectively be your 'eyes and ears' as we are constantly informed about interesting opportunities and many of our senior contacts within law firms keep us apprised of the 'state of play' in the legal profession at any one time. We are always happy to hear about your aspirations and indeed, this will help us to identify the right opportunity for you as and when it arises. Our experienced consultants may also be able to make some useful suggestions which could help in the formulation of long term goals and career plans.

We often possess information about the size and structure of law firms and their various departments. We also tend to get a sense of 'company culture' in our travels around the country. This information may be useful if you are considering changes.

We find that recruitment patterns tend to move in waves. At the moment for instance, we are being asked to look for COMMERCIAL PROPERTY specialists in

East Anglia and the East Midlands. We are constantly asked for CORPORATE lawyers and are at present dealing with a number of interesting positions. We have good relationships with City firms and are increasingly establishing a good rapport with firms on the Channel Islands.

We are on the look-out for PRIVATE CLIENT specialists to work in the Home Counties and East Anglia. Private Client positions seem abundant all over the country at the moment as many firms are seeking to expand or improve the quality of work within their departments. In the East Midlands we are also working with firms looking for SENIOR EMPLOYMENT and SENIOR COMMERCIAL LITIGATION lawyers.

So, please feel free to talk to us if you are curious about any of the above or simply the state of the market at the moment.