



Précis Paper

Ensuring purpose as a practitioner in 2021

A discussion about the importance of creating and keeping a healthy mindset for lawyers to assist them in finding purpose and success on their own terms and the ways in which coaching can play an important role in achieving this.

Discussion Includes

- Why is coaching for lawyers important?
- Why do people seek out coaching services?
- Lawyers coaching lawyers
- Research
- Obstacles holding back Southern Hemisphere lawyers from exploring professional coaching
- The connection between a professional coach and a client's vision of success
- Access
- Use of coaching by law firms
- Internal v External Life Coaches
- Takeaways and tips

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Ensuring purpose as a practitioner in 2021

In this edition of BenchTV, Claire Bibby (Senior Lawyer, Claire Bibby Pty Ltd, Sydney), Lara Wentworth (Performance and Wellness Coach, Lara Wentworth, Sydney), Katie Gray (Lawyer, Principals of Practice, Auckland) and Frieda Levycky (Founder, Braving Boundaries, Western Cape) discuss the importance of creating and keeping a healthy mindset for lawyers to assist them in finding purpose and success on their own terms and the ways in which coaching can play an important role in achieving this.

Why is coaching for lawyers important?

1. Coaching for lawyers is an issue that has had little if any air time in the Southern hemisphere but is booming in the Northern part of the globe.
2. Lawyers are typically not taught communication or interpersonal skills. They are not taught about trust building with our clients or with their colleagues. They are not taught time management or stress management, nor the elusive concept of life balance.
3. Lawyers should be striving for success on their own terms not the idea of success that has been passed through generations of lawyers, traditions and culture.
4. It is important to strive for a healthy mindset in practice. Lawyers should be striving towards what it is that is going to give them a sustainable career. It is key for lawyers to be able to communicate that and make the requests that they need to make and for those decisions and requests to be respected and supported.
5. There are traditional, deep seated beliefs that lawyers hold which are often the things that need to be reexamined and as such law is a profession that can be really well serviced by coaching.
6. The use by lawyers of professional is embraced in North America and Western Europe but less so in other parts of the world. Recent statistics released by the International Coaching Federation indicate that these two Northern Hemisphere areas account for over 75% of the world's professional coaching businesses for clients.

Why do people seek out coaching services?

7. A lot of people seek out coaching services when they are trying to get themselves to the next level in their career. They feel stuck and need help to shift or lodge this 'stuck' feeling. A lot of the time they don't know where to go and what their purpose is.
8. Many clients seek coaches out for things like not feeling good enough to be practicing the law or they are struggling to cope with the overachieving and perfectionism that is often attributable to lawyers.

9. Coaches assist clients by assisting them with perceptual positioning, that is assisting clients to look at issues, problems and the like from other perspectives.
10. One issue that frequently affects lawyers is self-confidence. Lawyers often feel under pressure and do not know what to do about it or how to make a request of their employers/colleagues to verbalise what they need.

Lawyers coaching lawyers

11. Lawyers coaching lawyers is all about relatability and connectivity. They know what it is like to be in a law firm or in corporate as an in-house counsel and there is an automatic understanding of the core concept of what practicing law entails and the issues the client may be going through.
12. This means a coach's training enables them to cater for the typical issues that come up in law firms and the impact that they have on their client's personal lives.
13. Further, a characteristic that is common to a lawyer is that they are often overachievers and lawyers as coaches can understand the challenges that these types of personalities can face.

Research

14. The US market is the most mature for lawyers coaching other lawyers. Independent research carried out in 2020 by Barker Gilmour in New York was undertaken looking at over 500 US lawyers. The research found that 56% of lawyers that were promoted had used an executive coach. Of those 56% of promoted lawyers, 83% of them rated the value of coaching as either extremely valuable or valuable.
15. This information however is not filtering down to Australia, New Zealand, South African markets yet.

Obstacles holding back Southern Hemisphere lawyers from exploring professional coaching

16. In Australia, amongst members of the legal profession, there is a stigma around asking for help. Lawyers are almost expected to be stressed and overworked and at the same time are expected to perform at their best being under that much pressure. There are not many avenues for lawyers to put their hand up and ask for help as the stigma might mean they are not good lawyers.
17. Further, coaching is fairly new in the Southern hemisphere as compared to the Northern hemisphere and therefore it may be a maturity thing, not having been as exposed to it as other parts in the world are and have been.
18. There was also a time when the only people who got coaching were the people who had problems and as such, there may be further stigma around coaching only being useful for

people having problems. There is a real lack of knowledge about coaching and the benefits that it can bring.

The connection between a professional coach and a client's vision of success

19. One thing about coaching that perhaps people do not understand is that it is not about fixing broken people.
20. Coaching is very different to mentoring in the sense that coaches do not give advice. Coaching is about allowing the coach to create a space to work out what a client needs to do, what is holding them back and determining how they want to move forward. A coach can provide a hand in shifting habits, shifting behaviour, feeling differently, changing a person's internal dialogue and helping them to see things from a different perspective.
21. Lawyers are highly analytical people who need to see evidence, so when lawyers are looking for coaches, it can be daunting. It is important for lawyers to determine whether a coach that they are looking into is actually a coach. This is because any person can call themselves a coach and it is not regulated in that way. Therefore, it is important to look into that person, make sure they have some qualifications and training and to check their testimonials.
22. At the end of the day, coaching is about relationships and therefore it is essential that the client can relate to that person.
23. If lawyers invest in themselves and their own wellbeing and healthy mindset it will make them better lawyers so that they can better service other people.

Access

24. Firstly, if a lawyer is at a firm or an organisation that supports coaching, the first step would be to have a discussion with their manager, human resources or learning and development team.
25. It is important to remember that even if a coach was a great fit for a colleague or a boss, it might not be a great fit for you as an individual. It is about having chemistry meetings with coaches and trying to find somebody that you can feel comfortable with, finding someone you can be open and vulnerable with and finding someone who has care and concern for you at the heart of their practice.
26. It is also important for a coach to be able to challenge a client.
27. The cost for a coach has a large variance between coaches. They can be engaged for as little as \$150.00 an hour - \$1,000.00 an hour.

Use of coaches by law firms

28. Coaching should be a significant part of a legal program and the legal industry. There are many benefits to coaching from a law firm's perspective

29. There is individual coaching and there is group coaching. Individual coaching is coaching whereby an individual can choose to go in and do so on their own accord. Group coaching is a great idea for a group of people who have the same goal to build confidence, share ideas and hear other people in the same position.
30. Most individuals find that they are struggling on an individual issue that they do not wish to share in a public forum and need that one on one support in order to overcome that issue to be able to move forward.
31. Generally, if you have a happier, healthier and fulfilled workforce you have a more productive workforce and therefore a better bottom line.
32. Mental health and physical health are massively challenged within law firms. It is renowned for having problems that are not properly addressed. Addressing these issues means investing in training programs that support staff, it means investing in personal development plans and investing in coaching. These resources need to be part of the framework of a legal firm nowadays to help staff create profit and your bottom line.

Internal v External Life Coaches

33. The one caution is that if people are considering bringing internal coaches into an organisation or law firm, it is imperative to make sure that they are adequately trained and adequately skilled to spot any potential conflicts of interest or any situations they may need to step back as a coach if they cannot be objective.
34. It is also important to remember that not everybody wants to be coached by someone else within the organisation. Therefore, whilst internal coaching will be fantastic in a lot of cases, there are some cases where firms and organisations are still, notwithstanding the costs, going to have to consider external coaching.

Takeaways and Tips

35. People need to stretch themselves; people gain a lot when they start to reach the external parts of their comfort zone.
36. It is important to take note of feedback; what is that consistent piece of feedback you receive? It is important to think about how you are perceived and determine if that is useful in getting you onto the track that you want to be on.
37. It is important for lawyers to get into the habit of asking themselves resourceful questions and remembering that even if they do not have the answers now, it does not mean that they should stop asking the questions as eventually the answers will come.
38. Nothing changes if nothing changes.

BIOGRAPHY

Claire Bibby

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Claire Bibby is an Industry/Professional Fellow within the Faculty of Law at the University of Technology, Sydney. She is also an Honorary Member of the Association of Corporate Counsel, an Entrepreneur Ambassador for Opportunity International, a member of the Australian Financial Reviews Business Leaders Panel, a member of the SmartCompany's Readers Panel, a member of the Harvard Business Review Advisory Council and is a committee member of the NSW Law Society Futures Committee and the Resolution Institute.

Lara Wentworth

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Lara has been practicing as a lawyer for over 17 years, mainly in the areas of Family Law and Estate Planning. Lara holds a masters in Law majoring in Family Law. In more recent times she started a coaching and training business focused on members of the legal profession. She is a certified Master Practitioner in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and currently on track to become an Internationally Certified Coach with the International Coaching Federation (ICF).

Katie Gray

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Katie is an International Coach Federation trained coach and member and former partner of a global law firm. She has 16 years of experience in various types of legal practice.

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Frieda is an English qualified lawyers with over 13 years of experience in the international legal arena, both in private practice and in-house. Frieda is a Consultant in Cape Town and specialises in cross-border M&A transactions with a particular niche in the commodities sector.