

In-House - Part of the Team



“Right, come on, let’s go for a walk.” I looked up in confusion. It was my first day in an in-house legal environment and I was still in the process of locating stationery and memorising names, so going on a stroll was not what I had expected my supervisor to suggest. But this was the start of an important lesson.

Having trained and qualified in private practice I was more used to taking a reactive stance in relation to work - I dealt with whatever came onto my desk but that was all. Admittedly this may have been due to my then junior position, but it has been both time and my first in house supervisor - who have taught me that it is far more important to be proactive. He saw the value in investing time in regularly walking the floors and interacting with people across the whole business. I came to understand that by being seen and being seen to be accessible, it was possible to cultivate a legal role which was both positive and proactive. Instead of merely waiting for work to materialise and problems to appear, by connecting with all parts of the business and doing so in an approachable way, people would start discussing plans and issues at an early stage. This in turn meant that a proportion of potential legal problems could be avoided.

When I first started out in-house I was slightly concerned about the lack of distance between myself and my clients. In private practice there was some feeling of safety in the divide provided by emails and phone calls, so the thought that someone could just appear at my desk unannounced with a question or two was initially rather unnerving. Now, some twelve years later, one of the aspects of the in-house environment which I value most is the feeling of being there ‘at the coal face’, readily accessible, as part of the same team as the internal business clients.

That ‘same team’ feeling can be achieved in a number of ways and bridging the gap between the lawyers and the rest of the commercial folk undoubtedly benefits the business as a whole:

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