

PROFILE

Name: Ann Buxton

Position: CEO

Chambers: Hardwicke



Hardwicke seems to have gone from strength to strength?

Hardwicke is a high quality civil chambers, that now stands at number 29 in The Lawyer's top 30 sets at the Bar. We have more than doubled billings in the last 5 years and were delighted that Paul Reed took Silk this year. We were also pleased to be recognised in the Chambers of the Year category in both last year's The Lawyer Awards and this year's Legal Business Awards. We see it as a reflection of how we are now perceived at the Bar – a dynamic set which has transformed itself through the objectives of offering real service to clients and support to barristers. We have clearly defined our values, aiming to be innovative, commercial, approachable and client focused. We have concentrated on building long-term profitable relationships with our clients and maximizing cross-selling opportunities. This has meant our client base has changed over time, although we continue to nurture long-standing relationships. I also think we're very lucky to have Nigel Jones QC as our Head of Chambers. He puts a huge amount of effort into running chambers and is able to balance

this with an extremely successful practice – no mean feat!

You went through a major restructuring of your clerks room with some impressive and unprecedented hires... brave new world?

This development was driven by a client survey asking key clients what was important to them. We used their feedback to define our strategy and, as a result, restructured Hardwicke into four client facing divisions, which mirrors the structure of many leading firms. To support this new structure, we remodelled our staffing, again with the twin objectives of giving better support to our barristers and our clients. This led to securing Amanda Illing (formerly of Matrix) as our new Practice Director. She is supported by four Senior Practice Managers each leading a division. We took the bold step of recruiting from outside the Bar. Helen Burness came from an international law firm where she was a Business Development Manager, and Vivian Frew, who is a solicitor with extensive experience of the international insurance market. Our Property & Private Client division and Public Law division posts were filled from the internal promotion of Paul Horsfield and

Daniel Kemp. At the most junior level we appointed three recently qualified graduates, two of whom have law degrees. We have invested heavily in training and we're confident that we have the right mix of skills and experience to achieve our objectives. We also thought it was time to move away from the somewhat Dickensian title of "clerk" and now use the term Practice Manager – so it is indeed a "brave new world"! Our focus now is on nurturing our existing relationships, business development and in particular, key account management.

You're on quite an aggressive business plan to get into the top 20 and push through the £20m mark...how is that working out?

We've continued to see double-digit annual growth as well as significant increases in earning per barrister, and we are now well on our way to achieving our financial targets. We have true strength in the litigation market and we've seen the benefit of cross-selling within our client base – a core part of our key account programme. I'm delighted that we've managed to go through such massive change in our structure, branding and staffing without missing a beat in our billings growth. Our staff are happy, motivated by their clearly defined responsibilities and energised by the challenges they've been set. We know we've got the team to achieve our goals.

Hardwicke has a reputation for dramatically increasing a barrister's practice within 12-18 months of joining, why do you think this is?

I think that when a barrister wants to move there is often a problem in their existing set. We have a policy of offering tenancies where we see a real win-win opportunity so that the barrister's practice benefits and chambers strengthens its client service. What we have been able to do is maintain a barrister's existing client base while providing new introductions – the growth comes from combining the two. As with most things in business, it's a lot of hard work – there's no magic bullet.

Your thoughts on the legal services reforms?

We are very aware of the potential threats and also the opportunities that arise from the Legal Services Act 2007. In fact, we recently spent a day as a chambers making sure our members understood the new legal landscape, the new prospects available to them and the possible vehicles such as ProcureCos. We are now looking at opportunities within each division but have no immediate plans to form an LDP, BOP, or ABS. We will continue to review the options but we have to make sure they are right for our barristers and our clients.

What does the future hold for Hardwicke?

Professor Stephen Mayson said recently that for legal service firms "survival is optional". We are confident that with our new strategy, client focus and the talent of our barristers, Hardwicke will not only survive but flourish. ❖

Ann Buxton was interviewed by Guy Hewetson, LPA Legal

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