

Empower employees

How modern law firms can attract and retain talent



Episode 4
of the
**Build Better
Habits Series**



Build effective **empower** **employees** habits

For episode four of the [Build Better Habits webinar series](#), we were joined by Tim Kidd, CEO at The Institute of Legal Finance & Management (ILFM), Joanna Gaudoin, Director at Inside Out Image, and Leah Steele, Owner of Searching for Serenity. Our expert panel shared their practical tips and advice on how law firms can implement an effective workplace culture that empowers employees, retains talent, and improves overall performance.

The discussion highlighted the importance of having a human approach to your operational strategy. As well as focusing on your clients' needs, invest resource into ensuring a supportive, honest, and collaborative culture is present throughout your firm to improve retention and help hire new talent.

The effectiveness of your firm's culture will determine the longevity of your business. And its effectiveness is determined by the behaviours modelled by management, the safety to share ideas and feedback, and the communication and progression plans discussed internally. Empowering employees will ensure your teams are motivated, passionate, and loyal to the firm, which in turn increases productivity, profitability, and client satisfaction.

In this guide we discuss exactly what an empower employee mindset is and provide practical advice for creating the right culture and environment for long-term success.

In this guide we cover:

What an empower employee mindset is

How a change in mindset can help to overcome the current hiring challenge

The habits firms need to adopt to ensure they're empowering employees

Advice on creating the right culture and environment for an effective team

Meet our panel of legal experts



Tim Kidd – CEO

The ILFM provides qualifications, training, knowledge, support, and information for anyone working in legal finance or practice management. It offers recognised professional qualifications, regular training days on issues relevant to the industry, regulatory information and many support features and services, including an industry magazine.



Joanna Gaudoin – Owner

Inside Out Image helps companies and individuals develop highly effective professional communication and relationship skills for greater business success. Working with various law firms across the UK, Joanna helps individuals to have a better personal impact for better business results.



Leah Steele – Owner

Owner, Leah Steele is a non-practising solicitor that now helps fellow lawyers and firms overcome and avoid burnout, stress, and imposter syndrome. Searching for Serenity offers the legal sector support, advice, and coaching for a successful career.



1

What does an **'empower employee'** mindset mean?

We begin by asking our panellists what an 'empower employee' mindset means for modern law firms, and they all shared similar ideas about communication, contribution, value, and safety. It's feel obvious to say 'take a human approach' to people management but it's usually the simple things that get overlooked when larger business challenges are present.

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What does an 'empower employee' mindset mean?



"This is a really important question because we are seeing real issues around recruiting at the moment, so it's even more important to retain people.

"I think there are three main things I would say to answer this question. Firstly, creating an environment where employees feel they can contribute and they're valued so they can give ideas.

"Secondly, is people need to feel safe to speak up about the negative stuff.

"And the third one is to make time for career development. My recommendation is to put some time in your diary every week, whether it's half an hour or an hour, for working on your career and working on your gaps."



"Knowledge provides confidence, so we try to encourage our member firms to really concentrate on training and qualifications, because that will provide employees with knowledge, which then leads to confidence. People with confidence definitely do their job better, so empowering them is to give them the confidence.

"I always think that part of empowering employees is really identifying everybody as very important in your organisation, from the bottom to the top. The culture of the organisation is absolutely vital to empowering employees."

What does an 'empower employee' mindset mean?



"For me, an empower employee mindset is very much about unlocking the traditional hierarchical structure that says, the person at the top knows the most and the person at the bottom knows the least. And instead widening it out to say "what do we all know? And what do I not know?"

"By turning the focus inwards, it becomes more of a learning process, where people are crowd sourcing ideas. We can get a much richer source of information for everybody.

"And when we're talking about retaining talent and being engaging, people then have more skin in the game. They're actually involved in what's going on."

"I always think that part of empowering employees is really identifying everybody as very important in your organisation, from the bottom to the top. The culture of the organisation is absolutely vital to empowering employees."

2

How can a **change in mindset** help with current retention and hiring challenges?

Across the sector, law firms are struggling to hire new talent, so it's more important than ever to retain your employees. Strong relationships and effective collaboration are crucial to a successful team, which is why our panellists discuss the importance of taking time to review your current habits, behaviours, and beliefs.

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How can a change in mindset help with current retention and hiring challenges?

"The reason we're all in business is to make somebody's life a little bit better. That could be staff, suppliers, customers, or anybody you like, but that should be the focus."



"Being valued and getting recognition is a huge thing as far as I'm concerned. You need to be understanding, caring, [and] ensure they have the right equipment, training, and support."



"Relationships are really key and so it's about making time for people to ensure they feel valued in the organisation."

"Of course, the compensation package does matter, but a lot of the time money isn't the biggest reason why people will stay and are loyal. Firms have got to differentiate in other ways, so creating the right positive culture helps increase loyalty to the organisation."

"Make sure your people are equipped with emotional development. It is tough. Some people have it more innately than others, and others need to work at it. The first part of that is being self-aware, to think about how I, as a person, engage with others."

"There is a company I'm working with at the moment and we're starting a mentoring programme and I think that's really valuable. A commitment to career progression is important because it makes people feel like they've got a plan and they're more likely to want to stick at a firm to continue to work on that plan."

How can a change in mindset help with current retention and hiring challenges?



"We can't just keep running on a treadmill. We can't be doing the same thing and expecting a better outcome. So what can we do that's different? How can we just take a breather and have time to reflect - time to stop for a second?"

"Ask ourselves, what else do we need to know? What can we do differently? It's very much, for me, about having a curious mindset."

"We acknowledged at the beginning of the session that there is a history of law firms having toxic cultures and even if your current firm does not have a toxic culture, we've got people bringing all of that baggage in. So we have to understand that we have to swing the pendulum further to make psychological safety and open discussion normal."

"We can't be doing the same thing and expecting a better outcome. So what can we do that's different? How can we just take a breather and have time to reflect?"

3

What are the **key habits** law firms should adopt to ensure they're empowering employees?

The panel agree that modern law firms should focus on the following habits when implementing an empower employee mindset:

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Six habits law firms should adopt

1 Increase channels for feedback

Employees need to feel safe when sharing feedback, especially if it's negative. Leah advises offering multiple options for providing feedback to encourage communication. "For example, have an external consultant come in, someone that's anonymous, confidential, and removed from the environment. Allow email feedback, ask surveys, and provide anonymous structures to give people safety."

2 Model the desired behaviour

Improved human connection happens through vulnerability. Positive change is a result of curiosity. Both behaviours are required for a more effective workplace culture. Leah suggests that to effect a culture shift, the desired behaviour needs to be modelled by managers. "Transparency, vulnerability, and curiosity needs to be visible. Managers should share experiences when they weren't sure or got things wrong. You shift the culture by modelling it for others to see."

3 Regular feedback

A report by LawCare showed regular catch-ups were the most effective support measure in law firms. Joanna says that "If you're only giving feedback once a year it's hard to remember what happened months ago. Feedback isn't going to be specific enough because it'll lack examples and clarity, and nobody can act on that." She explains how regular feedback will enable everyone to develop and improve."

4 Eliminate fear

"Fear in a workplace is awful; there's a huge difference between respect and fear." Tim stresses the importance of eliminating fear from your culture and advises the way to do that is by encouraging people to ask questions "and the way you encourage people to ask is to say yes often."

5 Team engagement

Joanna believes dedicating time to team and firm-wide engagement events, or activities, is crucial for better communication and collaboration. It's how individuals will get to know each other which then helps strengthen team performance.

6 Genuinely listen

Joanna advises "ask questions of your employees that you genuinely listen to the answers, rather than listening to respond." Humans want to feel heard to feel part of a group, and if you're only listening to immediately offer advice or add your opinion, employees can feel overlooked.

4

How can law firms **create the right culture and environment** for an effective team?

Changing a firm's culture isn't an overnight process; it's a gradual long-term strategy that involves a switch in mindset, success measures, and communication styles. Our panellists share their practical advice for fostering the right environment to improve performance.

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How can law firms create the right culture and environment for an effective team?



"Happy employees are productive, confident employees. Happy employees feel comfortable in the workplace and feel like they can ask and get support. So, all these things basically come down to what we've been saying and having a supportive culture in the workplace."

"Yes, we have to think about profits. Yes, we have to think about getting the work done and about productivity. But, all of those things are improved through empowerment and the workforce feeling that they are part of the best culture. Feeling that they are appreciated, and recognised. All of those things happen automatically when you've got a great workforce."

"The thing I will leave you with is that in every level of the organisation: just be kind. That's what it comes down to. Being as kind as you can."



"Check-ins. Having regular check-ins with staff. The report from LawCare found that this was the single most effective tool in order to help improve mental health outcomes, improve trust, and build confidence."

"Listen to people. Create the opportunities to listen to people. Create opportunities to hear from them independently outside of check-ins, outside of file reviews. We need those multiple streams of contact in order to actually hear what's going on and stop assuming that people will speak up."

How can law firms create the right culture and environment for an effective team?



"I would say, letting people know what your expectations are of them. Be specific, not vague, and I've seen this particularly in relation to business development."

"I think another thing is to trust people. If you're not sure if someone can do something, give it a go, work out what support they need to give it a go. A common thing I see with senior lawyers is they look at [the piece of work], and if it's not how they want it, they just change it and never take the person through why they changed it. That does not help develop anyone and is really demotivating for people."

"Letting people know **what your expectations are of them. Be specific, not vague."**

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