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DIFFICULTIES FACING TODAY'S HR PROFESSIONALS

Like most office/work environments a major issue confronting our HR Professionals in today's employment market is an uphill battle to find and employ experienced legal personnel. Additionally and just as important ongoing issues facing today's HR Managers include staff retention, maintaining good staff morale, developing working relationships, mentoring, continual training and professional development and of course continued business growth.

There is no one real answer or solution to improving your staff requirements being either new hires or retaining current employees. However as HR Professionals we need to have sound HR policies in place, be aware of constant changes within the working environment and strive to keep up to date with the numerous technological advances affecting our workplaces. It is essential to be aware of current changes in office technology and government legislation - particularly at present with regards to the current new legislation.

Presently the employment market in Australia is very tight and almost every profession is experiencing a shortage of experienced personnel (both in the professional and support area) – noticed more particularly in our regional areas. Over the last few years the legal profession has noticed a definite shortage of experienced personnel at the intermediate to senior level of expertise. It is for this reason that you need to have quality attraction and retention strategies in place, that work to develop, manage and oversee your new and current personnel requirements.

As well as good attraction strategies, you will need quality retention strategies to include a well planned professional welcoming and induction process; be able to maintain overall staff morale and contentment; have access to ongoing training and professional development; attend to regular interactive performance reviews; provide other staff inducements and benefits; and of course attend to exit interviews when you unfortunately lose a staff member. It may be too late to retain the employee leaving, but you can often benefit from valuable and perhaps timely information.

Inductions are certainly a good business practice to follow, however many orientation processes are often too short, not enough specific organisation and procedural information is provided, and frequently not sufficient job description details are supplied to all new employees.

Maintaining staff morale through leadership and understanding is paramount to developing ongoing employer and employee working relationships. The process of mentoring and providing continuing training and professional development is required for all staff from a junior support staff member right through to your senior Lawyers. The value you will see will be long term and loyal employees.

Performance reviews are another useful tool that is both beneficial to giving and receiving regular feedback to and from your employees, along with monitoring your staff's overall performance activities. Generally staff performance reviews are more satisfactory and constructive when attended to on a regular basis.

Staff inducements can cover a range of benefits including bonus salary and salary sacrificing incentives, provision of mobile phones and lap tops to professional staff, health and gym benefits to working from home - to be able to create a stable and satisfying workplace environment. The importance of the work and lifestyle balance is becoming more significant to all employees, and we will need to be mindful and prepare our strategic planning accordingly.

The role of an HR professional is very challenging and exciting, and is certainly a role that should be most valued for the ongoing succession planning of any size law firm, from a small legal practice to a top tier National firm.