



Practice  
Management  
Excellence

### Case Study

## In-house training for senior practice managers 3 Verulam Buildings Barristers

by

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### The Challenge

I came into the world of barristers' chambers about eight years ago from a background of 30 years' management and leadership in professional services and the public sector. I have been surprised by what I have seen and heard to be the paucity of training provided for staff and the lack of progressive training structures, especially in regard to clerks or practice managers, who perform key, client-facing functions in the promotion and management of a barrister's livelihood and the overall business of chambers. The assumption seems to have been, over many years, that skills and knowledge need only be learnt on the job, that you cannot teach lots of things, such as how to develop an affinity with clients, which is one of those attributes "you've either got or you haven't", and that staff don't want to be in a classroom in any case.

It's true that there are some people who, it turns out, just cannot be taught a specific skill, but that's entirely different from claiming that this skill cannot be taught to others. Indeed, I don't think I have ever come across a situation in which a person has not gained some benefit from being spoken to by someone with experience in the subject in question, and possibly with a different angle on it. I am pleased to see the signs across the Bar that the attitude that training is just costly in time and money and provides little or no return is starting to change, and it's certainly an attitude that doesn't exist at 3 Verulam Buildings, my current set of chambers.

### The Solution

The desire of our members, our Senior Practice Manager and me that Chambers should invest further in the training of our practice managers led me to Don Turner of Practice Management Excellence. I wanted to find an organisation that could combine proven success in commercial business operations and management with a detailed understanding of how barristers' chambers function, along with both the skills and the credibility to deliver training in the core areas of practice management.

I had known of Bill Connor and ABC Chambers Solutions; Bill is a highly experienced and respected former senior clerk and now a consultant in chambers management, marketing and recruitment. I had also heard that he had gone into partnership with Don Turner. Don's successful business background, professional qualifications and experience as a trainer and business coach, aligned with Bill's knowledge, seemed to have the potential to offer just the sort of training solution I envisaged.

Meeting Don confirmed for me not only these attributes, but also his sincerity, his passion in what he does, a genuine interest in people and, importantly, a wholly business-like understanding of the practicalities of designing, scheduling and costing a training programme for a group of practice managers with varying degrees of experience. It also struck me that he would easily and quickly develop a good rapport with the people he was training.

Don tailored the programme to our specific needs, and the result was a series of modules, each lasting a day, and covering a full range of business development, networking, communication and negotiation skills, managing practice and performance reviews, and how to instil in yourself and others the culture of business coaching. We also had to run each module on three days, in order to take no more than a third of our practice managers away from the clerks' room at any one time.

## The Outcome

We completed the programme over two months; every practice manager attended, and the feedback was universally positive. I attended every module myself and so can personally attest the quality of the course. We are already seeing benefits in the way individuals are using aspects of the training in their day-to-day work. What is also abundantly clear is the unquantifiable benefit gained from the staff's appreciation that the employer is investing in them and their development. Don managed expertly and with flexibility from start to finish the whole process of discussing our training needs, designing the programme, delivering the training (which also involved Bill Connor), meeting to discuss progress during the course and following up afterwards.

Most importantly, I see this course as marking just the beginning of our involvement with PME, with the creation and implementation of a personal development programme that takes each practice manager from joining Chambers as a junior clerk through their career's progression to senior practice manager and into chambers' management, in a combination of structured training and bespoke coaching. I see PME as our partners in devising and delivering this core element in Chambers' overall development as a modern and competitive business.

**If you feel PME training can help you with your staff development and engagement please contact PME training to discuss.**

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