

# Career Doctor

## Dear Career Doctor

*I am an articulated clerk at a law firm in the city. I have completed rotations in the corporate and commercial group and the litigation group. I am currently undertaking my final rotation in the workplace relations group where I am supposed to continue to work as a first-year solicitor.*

*I have been told by our human resources manager that a partner in the corporate and commercial group will be conducting my performance and salary review this year. I am concerned about this as I have not done any work for this partner and he is therefore unaware of what work I have been doing and the quality of it. I would therefore prefer that a more relevant partner conduct my review. How do I go about approaching our human resources manager about this? Previously, I have approached her about another important issue; however, I feel that she is just so busy that that was not adequately dealt with.*

*Also, I am not sure that I want to remain in the work group that I am currently in. Is this also something I should raise with our human resources manager and if so, how?*

*Full of Dilemmas*

## Dear Full of Dilemmas

You are correct in assuming that the role of a human resources manager is a very demanding one. He or she is often responsible for a range of activities such as recruitment, performance and salary reviews, placement of solicitors into specific groups within the firm, issues that arise between partners and solicitors, the articulated clerk program, training and development, secondments and the list goes on. That is why it is very important that you approach your concerns in the right way in order to achieve a successful outcome.

Sometimes a human resources manager regrettably may not have the capacity to deal with every solicitor's issues immediately. In order to have your issues attended to by your human resources manager satisfactorily and in a timely manner, you need to be well organised yourself and approach the situation tactfully:

First, be prepared! Make a list of the things you would like to discuss with her – it is more efficient and helpful if you can deal with your issues in the one sitting. In your case, you need to discuss who will be conducting your review and the work group of which you would ideally like to be a part. You should prepare reasons why, in your opinion, the partner allocated to conduct your review may not necessarily be the appropriate partner and who in turn would be more suitable. And prepare reasons why you think you would prefer to work in another work group and how that placement will benefit the firm.

Second, make an appointment to meet with your human resources manager. Having a scheduled time will hopefully guarantee that you will have her undivided attention and that you will have an uninterrupted discussion. It will also give you the opportunity to voice your concerns in a more formal setting signifying that these concerns are important to you.

It is important to remember that a human resources manager is often the middle person between you as an articulated clerk or solicitor and the partners. He or she has to be able to arrive (relatively painlessly!) at solutions that suit both parties. You therefore need to respect the situation, be patient and tactful at all times.

Keep an open mind. There may be a perfectly good reason why the firm considers you to be a good addition

to the workplace relations group – listen to the reasoning behind this decision. If you are unhappy with the decision, discuss why it would be more suitable and beneficial to the firm for you to be placed in another specific practice area. Similarly, there may be a perfectly good reason why the firm has allocated this particular partner to conduct your review. If you are satisfied with the reason, then make sure you are properly prepared for the review with this partner by:

- making a list of your achievements to date, including details about your budget, demonstrated teamwork, contribution to the social life of your firm, articles that you have written, and your involvement in any specific marketing activities. This way you ensure that the partner is acutely aware of your contribution to your career development and to the firm's profitability;
- collating any feedback that you have obtained from the partners or senior solicitors that you have done work for;
- making a list of any issues that you may wish to discuss at review. This is where you may also wish to discuss further (if it has not already been satisfactorily resolved) the issue of the practice area in which you have been placed. Other examples of issues that you may wish to discuss include the quality of work that you are being given, the supervision you are getting, opportunities for advancement, and the setting of achievable and agreed objectives for the next 12 months.

By taking this organised and pragmatic approach, you will soon discover how helpful and resourceful your human resources manager can be.

Other avenues of support and advice may also exist. You may be able to enlist the support of a more senior solicitor who can discuss your concerns with you:

Are there second or third year solicitors who may have been through similar situations when they were placed as first year solicitors?

Is there someone in the workplace relations team you feel comfortable talking to?

Are any of the other articulated clerks at the firm experiencing the same concerns?

Hopefully, you can find the support you need to deal with your dilemma. ■

**Career Doctor**

# Mahlab

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Note that the views expressed are that of the author based on personal experience. ■



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