

# Career Doctor

NALINI MOORE, MAHLAB RECRUITMENT

## Dear Career Doctor

*I am a fourth year solicitor at a small law firm in the city. For a while I have been looking to gain more experience and specialise in a different group within the firm who I know are looking to recruit another solicitor.*

*I have flagged this with my partner, with whom I have a good working relationship. He claims he is sympathetic but has not taken any real steps to address my concerns.*

*I really enjoy the culture of the firm and find the work and clients challenging and rewarding, and would be disappointed if I was forced to start looking elsewhere.*

*Should I be approaching Human Resources about this? In the past I have not found them to be particularly effective at addressing my concerns, particularly if I have had issues arising from decisions or behaviour of partners of the firm.*

*Frustrated*

## Dear Seeking a Change

Determining the area of law in which you wish to practise is an important exercise for every solicitor. It is very important that you do your research before making the final decision to move groups (provided your firm can accommodate such a move). Given that you have completed a rotation in the Energy & Resources group obviously helps make your decision easier, as you have already sampled the work in that specialist area.

Other things you can do are:

- select a solicitor in the Energy & Resources group with whom you feel comfortable and discuss that group and the types of matters they are currently working on;
- read up on current issues that affect that area of practice;
- speak with an experienced recruitment consultant about different practice areas; then
- have a discussion with your Human Resources Manager.

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 placement of solicitors into specific groups within the firm, recruitment, performance and salary reviews, 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 all of your issues in the one sitting. In your case, you need to discuss the

possibility of being placed in the Energy & Resources group. You should prepare reasons why you would prefer to work in that group and how that placement will benefit you and the firm. And if you do have concerns about your salary and performance review, be prepared to discuss those concerns as well.

- Second, make an appointment to meet with your Human Resources Manager. Having a scheduled time will hopefully allow you to 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 a 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 Corporate/Mergers & Acquisitions group – listen to the reasoning behind this decision. If you are still unhappy with the decision, perhaps explore whether a move might be available in the foreseeable future. Similarly your Human Resources Manager may be able to allay any concerns you have about your salary and performance review by making suggestions as to how to go about preparing for it. In so preparing, you will have a head start if you do the following:
  1. make a list of your achievements to date including details about your financial performance, 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 firm is acutely aware of your contribution to your career development and to the firm's profitability;
  2. collate any feedback that you have obtained from the partners or senior solicitors for whom you have done work;
  3. make 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!

Hopefully you can find the support you need to deal with your dilemma!

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