



PARTNER SATISFACTION SURVEY

FIRM FRIENDSHIPS

Friendship is cited as the major reason why partners stay loyal to a firm, although as the *ALB/Cicero* partner satisfaction survey reveals, the partnership track can be wobbly at times, and the younger generation has different expectations to their forebears about what life is like as a partner

In the legal industry, servicing clients' needs and wants is placed above all else. In accepting the gong as the best large law firm at the *BRW* magazine awards earlier this year, Allens Arthur Robinson managing partner Tom Poulton crystallised how this dictates the attitudes of partners on the

THE SURVEY: KEY FINDINGS

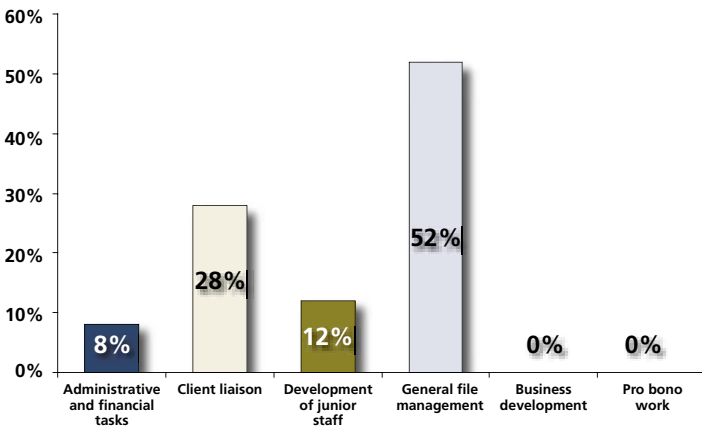
- **52%** of respondents believe that being a partner has lived up to their expectations
- **28%** of those surveyed said the partnership model provides them with what they want
- **24%** of partners state they are not open to offers from other firms
- **48%** expect their salary to increase this year

ground. "We expect our people to treat the client as if they were God and to put themselves out for clients," he said. "You don't say 'Sorry I can't do it, I'm playing cricket on the weekend'. You don't have a right to any free time."

How does this attitude correlate with an increasing emphasis on work-life balance and what do partners rank as the most important factors in deciding whether to stay or look for another firm?



Q What would form the largest part of your standard day?



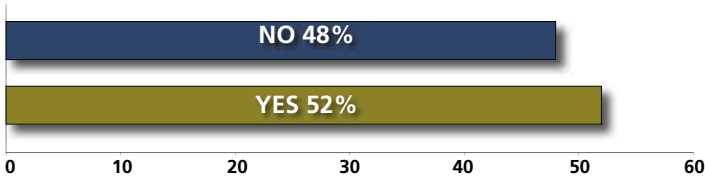
The majority of all respondents said that general file management formed the bulk of their work time (52%). Client liaison was the next highest with 28%, and development of junior staff was the only other work function to warrant a mention in double figures (12%). Business development and pro bono work received no responses.

A desire on the part of legal professionals to spend more time with their clients and less time on administration tasks is a trend noted within the legal profession.

“When I speak with lawyers, they tell me that servicing the needs of clients and being able to offer a more personalised service are big reasons why they are looking for a change,” says Jonathan Gill, managing director of the specialist legal search and recruitment firm Cicero. “Clients I speak with are often sick of the internal politics that exists and want to move on because they feel they are being sidelined or marginalised.”

The survey results support Gill’s comments.

Q Has being a partner lived up to your expectations?



Respondents who believed that being in a partnership did not live up to their expectations gave two major reasons as to why. Nearly half of the unhappy partners cited the internal politics within their firm (46%), with unrealistic expectations of management (31%) the second highest source of dissatisfaction.

Trying to create a harmonious environment and reduce the burden of management is becoming more of a priority for firms.

“When I started my career, the ratio of lawyers working with partners was about one to one,” says Peter Butler, managing partner at Freehills. “Now you see around one partner for every three lawyers, or even higher. With that ratio, there’s an incredible need for partners to expand their management skills.”

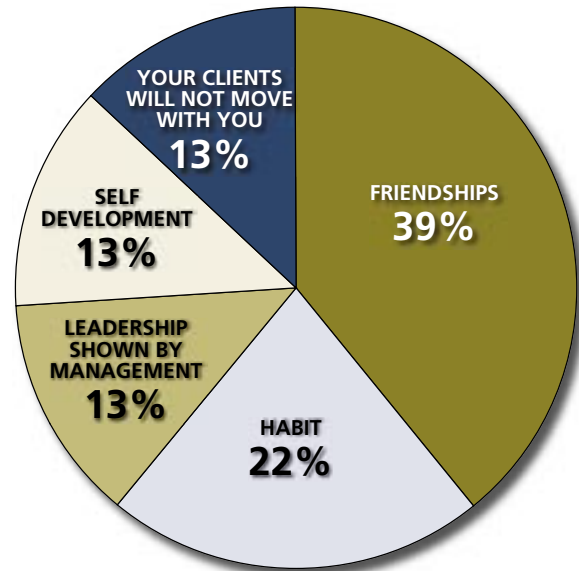
Butler believes the attitude towards staff development has been one of the most significant cultural changes during his long tenure in the legal profession.

“While the emphasis has remained in ensuring the client receives an excellent level of service, the internal processes within firms has altered substantially,” he says. “Traditionally, young lawyers were not regarded as an important part in this process, but now they are seen as critical stakeholders.

“The ability to coach and train young lawyers, supervise and delegate is now an important part of a partner’s role.”

Friendships (39%) was the leading reason for why partners stay

Q What is the major reason you stay at your current firm?



at their current firm. The next highest response was the practical consideration that clients will not move with you (22%).

According to Gill, the bonds between lawyers is a significant reason why lawyers stay at firms or look to start afresh.

“It should be remembered that many of the successful boutique firms such as Atanaskovic Hartnell, Watson Mangioni and Speed and Stracey were established by colleagues and friends who had previously worked together, and more recently Cosoff Cudmore



Jonathan Gill, Cicero

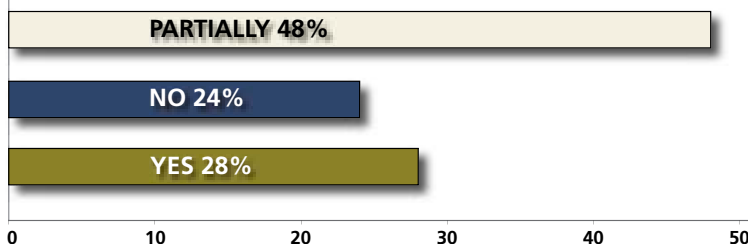
Knox was started by lawyers from different Adelaide firms brought together by a mutual friend," Gill says.

"We're becoming more involved in team moves with our clients and are certainly seeing more groups of friends move en masse."

This seems to be the case with senior lawyers, who feel that after years of devoting their time to career advancement, they are now after a greater sense of personal satisfaction by working with friends.

This was certainly the case for three prominent New Zealand lawyers who left the big boys to establish their own boutique practice, Greenwood Roche Chisnall. John Greenwood and Bob Roche were formerly partners at Chapman Tripp, while David

Q Does your partnership model provide you with what you want?



Chisnall was with Bell Gully. The seeds for the new firm were laid when Roche and Chisnall met on opposite sides of the bench in the famous Ngai Tahu tribal land claim against the crown. Roche acted for the crown and Chisnall represented the Ngai Tahu tribe.

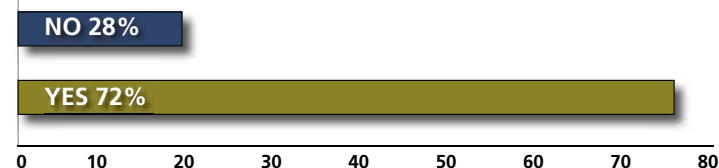
"Bob and I walked away from the trial as firm friends, and we always discussed the possibility of doing something on our own, usually over a few glasses of red," Chisnall says. "We're happy with the outcome and want to remain a small and specialised firm."

For the corporate heavyweights who have remained at large firms, friendships are also important. David Friedlander is one of Australia's leading securities and M&A lawyers. He is regularly approached by headhunters, and says that the reason he has stayed at Mallesons is the people.

"The environment here fosters learning and development. I work with a fantastic group of people and 90% of the reason why I stay at Mallesons is because of the friendships I have," he explains. The results from the survey indicate that law firms and partners are starting to realise that the motivations and attitudes of the children of baby boomers are vastly different to that of their immediate predecessors.

Gill says that, gradually, the upper levels of firms are starting to understand where Generations X and Y are coming from.

Q Are Generation X and Y issues impacting your business and profit performance?



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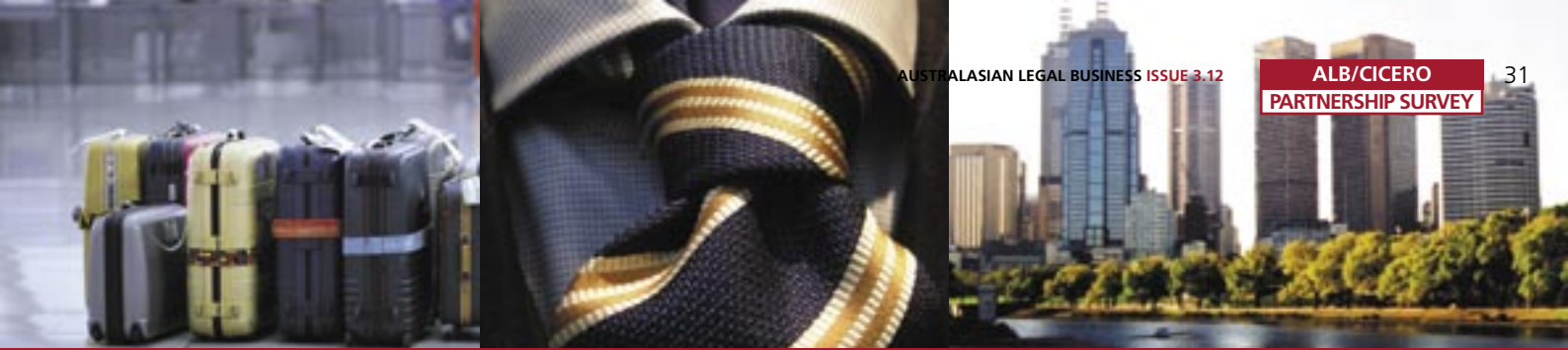
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“The younger generations will vote with their feet if they don’t feel they’re being listened to or offered the promise of promotion based on performance,” he says. “They want to become a partner quickly, and will look for other opportunities if they feel their progress is being checked.”

Butler says his firm tries to be aware of the different attitudes and beliefs that younger generations have.

“If you want to attract the good graduates and retain young employees, you need to ensure that you understand their wants and expectations,” he says. “We run specific leadership programs for partners so they are equipped to face the challenges of leading our lawyers in times where they will have a significant number of career options.

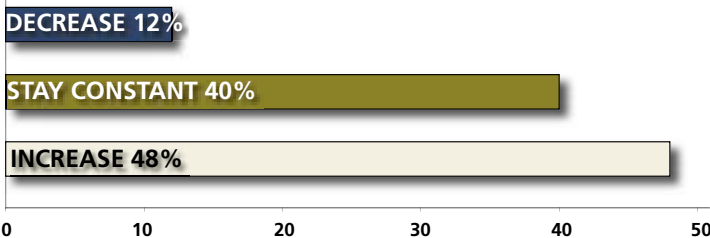
“We have a strong belief in coaching, and most partners and senior associates have had coaching training.”

Butler believes this process has already provided his firm with substantial benefits.

“These initiatives have helped to look after morale, spread the managerial workload and ensure a more sensible work/life balance while still ensuring a quality of service,” he says.

At Cicero, Gill runs specific coaching programs for partners at firms.

Q Do you expect your earnings this year to:



“There’s no school or Partnership 101 course where you can learn how to be a mentor,” Gill says. “Partners often find this role thrust upon them, as they have spent all their energies up to this point chasing the holy grail of partnership.”

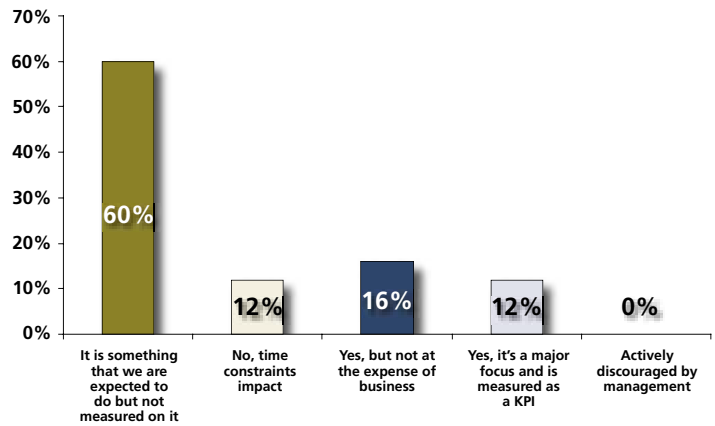
Jenny Bourke, associate director at Cicero, adds: “The concept of providing feedback and mentoring staff is often quite foreign to the mindset of partners.

“We find that in the training John runs, we’re constantly explaining the benefits of good communication and feedback.”

The experiences of Gill and Bourke help to explain why 60% of respondents feel that while they are expected to develop and mentor staff, they are not measured on it. Only 12% of respondents said it is a major focus and measured as a KPI.

Partners have many different interests competing for their time. They are expected to liaise with clients, provide a mentoring role to junior staff and still complete all their administrative and

Q Are you encouraged to spend time mentoring and developing staff?



financial tasks. So are there any tricks to achieving the right time management balance?

Butler believes a good management and partnership structure will enshrine a number of basic principles, and that a good culture will sustain them.

“Flexibility and balance is very important. It’s critical that there’s a satisfactory work allocation system as well as a supportive culture,” he says.

“By that I mean that there’s no guilt when it’s quiet and people leave at six, but are also able to stay back when there’s a spike.”

“Recognition and appreciation for the work you do is also needed,” Butler adds. “Feedback is critical. Partners need to constantly talk with people in their team and partners also need to be told they are doing a satisfactory job.

“While you will always be judged on the quality of the work you do, it’s paramount to your long-term growth and survival that you create the right work environment.” ALB

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