

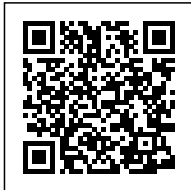
# EDITORIAL JAN/FEB 09

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Los titulares con los primeros despidos de socios en algunos de los más respetados bufetes de abogados de Londres han tenido repercusión en todo el mundo. En la Península Ibérica existe una preocupación natural entre los socios de las oficinas de Madrid, Lisboa y Barcelona.

Si bien la necesidad de los despidos ha sido provocada por el descenso del trabajo, hay quien dice que las empresas han tenido la oportunidad de revisar sus modelos de negocio. Más pequeña pero más

rentable, en línea con los EE.UU., parece ser el nuevo gmantrah de Londres.

Y mientras el mundo de los negocios, sin duda alguna, rinde homenaje a las firmas londinenses por la toma de medidas preventivas, a pesar de todo, parece que los valores de la profesión y de los socios siguen siendo fuertes en toda la Península Ibérica. De hecho, ahora puede ser el momento para que los socios directores vayan a la búsqueda en los despachos internacionales – siempre que, por supuesto, isus objetivos estén en la línea de aceptar una práctica más amplia y salarios más bajos!

The breaking news of partner-level redundancies at some of Londonfs most respected law firms sent shock waves around the world. In our Iberian region there is naturally concern amongst partners at international offices in Madrid, Lisbon and Barcelona.

Rumours of global partner redundancies at Ashurst were almost forgotten when Linklaters confirmed that up to 70 partner losses were being considered. Just as the impact of that announcement was being absorbed, Clifford Chance revealed it too was aiming to cut partners and it seems only inevitable that Allen & Overy and Freshfields will follow any day.

While the need for redundancies has clearly been triggered by the sharp reduction in work levels, some say the firms have taken the opportunity to review their business models. Smaller but more profitable, along classic US lines, appears to be the new London mantra.

While lawyer redundancies would be viewed in London as prudent administration in difficult times, across Iberia law firms and clients tell me that this action could be viewed as a result of bad management. Even in London, one former managing partner and now consultant told me: gThis shows that law firms are not a real partnership any more – higher profit is now the priority over collegiality.h

It is interesting also to hear from London that some continental offices of the Magic Circle, Madrid included, are more profitable than London – as their costs are much lower. Now is when we find out whether the London firms have a global approach to management or prioritise the jobs of their London partners.

Those who remain face tough times ahead. In Iberia the fall in the value of sterling has seen partner distributions at international firms reduced by 30% and there are some expectations that at least one Magic Circle will introduce a lockstep payment coefficient for its overseas offices, which could be set at 0.7 for Spain and 0.5 for Portugal.

Partners at local firms have been quick to say that they can live with

reduced earnings – after all money is only money – although some believe that the culture in UK firms has been similar to that of their investment banking clients, with high income being the benchmark for judging a lawyer's authority and external market value.

While the business world undoubtedly salutes the London firms for taking preventative action, it would appear that, despite everything, the values of partnership and profession are still strong across the Iberian Peninsula. Indeed, now may be the moment for national managing partners to go headhunting at the international firms – provided of course their targets are prepared to accept a wider practice and lower pay!

Moray McLaren  
Editor