

YOUR FIRM'S CULTURE IS WHAT DIFFERENTIATES IT FROM COMPETITORS

Posted on 21/06/2017



Category: [Opinions](#)



People like to feel they are part of a community – in a world with so many choices, we feel more comfortable working with individuals that share our values, says Avanlight Consulting's Michael Heron

I recently asked a partner at a law firm one of my favourite questions when speaking to my clients: "What worries you the most about your firm and keeps you from sleeping at night?" I nearly always get the same answer. "How do we differentiate ourselves from our competitors?"

Differentiation is increasingly challenging for the legal sector. Firms will often be chasing a similar portfolio of clients offering the same services and technical expertise. Or so it would seem. There is, in fact, one key differentiation – every firm has a completely different culture. Indeed, culture is everything and this is something developed and garnered over time, much like an individual's personality.

The real question to ask yourself is this: "How can you differentiate your firm through your culture and win new clients based on that culture?"

Some of the things that define your culture will be so deeply embedded within your firm's fabric that they will not be openly spoken about or written in any formal documents. It could be something cosmetic related to your dress code. For example, the lawyers at firms with more formal attire stick out like a sore thumb when you see them walking down the street. Your culture could be defined by educational background such as a specific university or qualification in a certain area. These are all things that define your culture and more importantly will attract a different type of client. This is parodied brilliantly in an American legal drama TV series – the New York firm that the story revolves around will only hire attorneys from Harvard Law. If the firm in question wasn't fictional and we could talk to their clients, they would probably tell us that this is the main reason they hire the firm.

When engaging with new clients there are lots of buzz words and phrases you will hear lawyers say: "We want to be your trusted adviser, we want to be more than your lawyer, we want to be your business partner, we offer the best client care and service, or we understand your industry better than anybody else."

The importance of community

If you fully understand the strengths of your culture, why not say "we think you would be a fantastic fit for our community"? Community is a great word. It makes people feel like they belong together. In a world with so many choices, don't we always feel more comfortable working with individuals that share our values, or brands that we feel best represent us and our ethos?

There is one law firm I know well that works a lot with private clients and ultra-high net worth individuals. I challenged the firm to really think about their values. Did they want to attract family offices, old money or celebrities and footballers? This differentiation really helped them analyse their own culture and define their strategy based on the type of client they wanted to attract and form their community around.

The next time you read about an initiative implemented by a competitor that catches your eye, just remember this. You can copy a competitor's strategy but you can never copy their culture.

Michael Heron is founder at Avanlight Consulting (www.avanlight.com)