

SPOTLIGHT

Empowering our people

The Firm is taking action to empower associates as part of its 2025 Strategy.



SPOTLIGHT

Empowering our people

The Firm put associate empowerment among the top priorities of its 2025 Strategy and we're driving things forward through our Associate Empowerment Task Force.

Led by New York Partner David Hille, the task force is responsible for identifying and implementing changes the Firm can make to better equip our associates to be their best.

Dave says: "An important aspect of the Firm's strategy is focused on our people and the first group we chose to prioritize is our associates.

"They are the engine room of the Firm, so it's critical we give them all the resources they need to successfully support our clients and to reach their potential.

"Attracting and retaining the best talent is the lifeblood of our success.

"Attracting and retaining the best talent is the lifeblood of our success."

DAVID HILLE, PARTNER

"I think as a Firm we've always been good at encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit, where associates can put themselves forward and drive their own careers, but we hope these improvements will give them even more support and resources to do that with confidence."

The task force was established in the autumn of 2021. It is made up of 12 people, including four associates, four partners and four Business Services professionals, who meet at least once a week to discuss progress.

Dave says: "When we put the team together, we wanted to ensure there was a good mix of people by seniority, geography, practice area and diversity.

"The involvement of associates on the task force was particularly important and, I have to say, their input so far has been incredible. The task force wouldn't be half as effective without them."

“I think as a Firm we’ve always been good at encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit, where associates can put themselves forward and drive their own careers, but we hope these improvements will give them even more support and resources to do that with confidence.”

DAVID HILLE, PARTNER



The journey begins



The team's task is to focus on improvements in three priority areas identified by the Executive Committee following insight from associates themselves.

These include: work allocation; professional skills training; and greater associate involvement in leadership and management in the Firm.

The task force then embarked on a fact-finding phase with a survey of all associates and numerous focus groups.

“One of the things that associates told us they needed most is transparency and consistency,” says Dave.

“The Firm does a lot of things well, but also with a lot of variation, which can lead to frustration for associates, because their experience of the Firm may differ between practices, partners or regions.

“While we don't want to lose our innovative spirit and appreciate that one size doesn't fit all, we need more global consistency and minimum expectations for all.”

Feedback from the research phase was also used to create a series of initiatives for all three priority areas.

Dave says: “We're now nearing the end of the development phase and are moving into implementation – something that we'll be doing in partnership with people and teams across the Firm.

“Implementing these improvements will require a culture change, so we'll continue to work with the likes of with the Learning and Development team, Human Resources and Development, GTS and Business Intelligence teams to make this happen, along with other leaders in the Firm, including our regional section heads and office executive partners.

“Having the buy-in of senior lawyers across the Firm is going to be vital to successfully embed these initiatives as business as usual.”

Some of the initiatives that are being implemented in each of the three priority areas are:

“While we don't want to lose our innovative spirit and appreciate that one size doesn't fit all, we need more global consistency and minimum expectations for all.”

DAVID HILLE, PARTNER



Work allocation



““This is important, so associates know that work is being allocated fairly and equitably”

DAVID HILLE, PARTNER

The task force has identified a set of guiding principles for work allocation (how associates get assignments and how we allocate work in a fair, equitable way).

“As part of this, we want to ensure there is a clearer connection between the work allocated and the associate’s continuing development,” Dave says.

The team is also developing the role of a work allocation manager role to promote consistency and improve strategic focus and is planning to implement a set of consistent tools to assist associates and senior lawyers in tracking and managing work allocation.

Dave says: “Some teams do have work allocation tools already, but we want to make these more consistent and complete.

“This is important, so associates know that work is being allocated fairly and equitably, while those allocating the work can get a better overview to help them make informed decisions.

“Work allocation is the most complex of the initiatives we need to implement, so it’s no small task, but the actions we’re taking have the potential to make a big impact for associates, the Firm and our clients.”

Professional skills training



Another of the three priorities of the task force is to implement improvements that will help associates develop professional skills.

These are non-legal skills that our clients say they value from our people, such as communication, project management, teamwork, and innovation.

Dave says: “What we’ve heard very clearly from our associates is that, while they benefit from course-orientated training programs, what they really value is for the training to be more closely connected to their daily work. They feel they have the potential to learn most from senior lawyers in the Firm, including partners, counsel and senior associates.

“So, we want to implement tools to encourage and incentivize senior lawyers to consistently embrace an apprenticeship mentality, teaching associates these vital professional skills from their own experience.

“This will run alongside our conventional course-style training and we’re also looking at developing a White & Case academy by potentially partnering with one or more prestigious universities.”

“We want to implement tools to encourage and incentivize senior lawyers to consistently embrace an apprenticeship mentality”

DAVID HILLE, PARTNER



Associate involvement in leadership and management



“We also want more associate involvement at section, industry and client group level.”

DAVID HILLE, PARTNER

The third area of focus is associate involvement in leadership and management.

Dave explains: “We’ve got a really good organizational structure in the Firm, from an office level to global committees, but what’s surprising is that there is very limited associate involvement.

“Through this task force, we want to implement an array of associate functions that interact with our existing management structures, for instance associate committees at the office level.

“These would help build a consistent minimum expectation of what office associate committees will look like across the Firm.

“We also want more associate involvement at section, industry and client group level.

“This isn’t just about getting associates’ names on a list. This is about them getting more opportunities to play an active role in the Firm’s leadership and management structure.

“It will benefit the Firm as well, because we’ve missed having that prominent associate voice on our committees in the past.”

Reaching our potential



Looking ahead, Dave is excited to see how improved associate empowerment can benefit associates, clients and the Firm.

“In terms of our people, my hope is that our associates will feel that the Firm is supporting them in their work for clients and in their development as lawyers and professionals,” he says.

“In turn, I hope they’ll feel a greater connection to the Firm and that they’ll be in a better position to support our clients.

“If we get this right, our people will be more likely to stay and more likely to reach their potential.

“That all leads to greater client satisfaction and a client experience that sets us apart from our competitors, which can only be a good thing.

“Empowering our people is at the heart of what we do. We need to attract and retain the best talent and we need our associates to be on top of their game.”

“Empowering our people is at the heart of what we do. We need to attract and retain the best talent and we need our associates to be on top of their game.”

DAVID HILLE, PARTNER



"I think the creation of the taskforce and the involvement of associates on the team shows great foresight by the Firm, because we're the ones closest to the ground and we can talk from experience about the next steps that need to be taken in areas such as work allocation, skills training and leadership opportunities."

EMIKO SINGH, LONDON ASSOCIATE



Associate driven



London Associate Emiko Singh is one of four associate representatives on the taskforce.

She says: "What's great about being involved is that we're not just putting across the associate perspective, but we're encouraged to be a driving force on the team, pushing forward proposals and being given responsibility to take a lead."

"I think the creation of the taskforce and the involvement of associates on the team shows great foresight by the Firm, because we're the ones closest to the ground and we can talk from experience about the next steps that need to be taken in areas such as work allocation, skills training and leadership opportunities."

"I've also learnt so much, because as part of our research, we spoke to people across the Firm and discovered a lot of the great things offices across the world are doing in these areas already."

"That's meant we can take some of these best practices and come up with a model we can apply on a global level."

"This is all geared towards enabling and equipping associates to develop into the best lawyers we can be. It should improve transparency and give us the tools we need to drive our careers forward with confidence."

"Our responsibility on the taskforce is to make sure we translate all we've learned into initiatives and make them a reality. Now we have a plan for what we want to achieve, it's about walking the talk and working with others to deliver those initiatives across the Firm."

"Our responsibility on the taskforce is to make sure we translate all we've learned into initiatives and make them a reality."

EMIKO SINGH, LONDON ASSOCIATE

