

Breaking the mould: a flexible law firm



Victorian Workplace
Mental Wellbeing
Collaboration

Justitia Lawyers and Consultants

As a boutique employment law firm in Melbourne, Justitia strives to be a progressive, healthy, commercial and sustainable workplace, achieving high productivity and success as it helps its clients achieve the same.

Justitia practices what it preaches through role modelling and experimentation, giving the firm and its lawyers increased credibility and a competitive edge.

A law firm breaking the mould

Under traditional law firm structures women lawyers are often held back from realising their full potential, while both men and women lawyers lack work-life balance.

Justitia has an alternative: the 'presumptive flexible work model'. This model assumes from the outset that employees will work flexibly and recognises that each person's work practices are unique according to their own personal requirements.

When a new lawyer joins Justitia, they're asked 'How do you want to work?' Everyone is supported, but individuals are ultimately responsible for how they manage their workload.

Along with good governance, and a focus on culture, Justitia's presumptive flexible work model not only fosters the talent of women lawyers and supports a healthier workplace for everyone, it's the foundation on which this innovative, highly-successful law firm has grown.

Justitia also:

- offers employees an extra day of leave and \$150 annually to thank someone special in their lives
- structures team meetings to reflect on work and non-work related activity that helps achieve the firm's objectives around being progressive, healthy, commercial and sustainable
- encourages walking meetings
- has a policy of continuous coaching and feedback instead of annual performance reviews
- employs law students as legal research assistants to build workforce capacity at Justitia and within the profession
- has a removable table tennis net on the main meeting room table to encourage social interaction and physical activity
- holds annual functions for lawyers and their families, hosted by the Managing Partner at her home
- holds annual off-site retreats to discuss the firm's strategy and innovations in the world of work.

"The true measure of our success is very low staff turnover and a happy workplace. The feedback I get from the staff is that they enjoy how our structure gives them the space to self-manage their workloads and the time to genuinely work together as a team. As a result, they have an increased sense of purpose and ownership in the firm."

- Sarah Rey, Managing Partner

How is work organised?

Justitia currently has nine lawyers and six legal research assistants across a flat organisational structure which means no silos and plenty of work variety.

Lawyers work in different client sectors and with different clients but team up on matters when required so work can be managed flexibly.

At Justitia's weekly team meetings everyone discusses workloads and how work will be allocated the following week considering lawyers' availability, level of expertise and previous experience with the client. It's a balancing act to meet everyone's needs.

The Managing Partner's role involves ensuring lawyers are working efficiently and happily, and that the firm's strategic goals are achieved while raising its profile across areas of strength and expertise. Lawyers are rewarded for their efficiency and contribution to the firm's culture, profile and client relationships.

*"Our less rigid approach to individual budgets means that we have the time and space to work in a collegiate manner, to mentor and support each other and to take an interest in the whole person at work. In the words of Frederic Laloux, author of *Reinventing Organizations*, at Justitia we 'invite our humanity to work'."*

- Laura Douglas, Senior Associate

What has the impact been for Justitia?

Justitia's presumptive flexible work model is a valuable point of distinction. The firm was named 'Law firm of the year' at the 2013 Law Institute of Victoria (LIV) Legal Awards and received the 'Sir Ken Robinson award for workplace flexibility' at the Australian Human Resources Institute's Inclusion and Diversity Awards in 2014. Justitia's flexible practices have contributed to:

- the firm's commercial success and growth
- high lawyer performance and morale
- low turnover rates
- attracting and maintaining satisfied clients.

Flexible work practices – what really works?

Supportive organisational cultures are critical

A flexible work model requires a cultural shift around the value of working flexibly. Justitia's Managing Partner, Sarah Rey, leads by example and has worked part-time since the firm's inception in 2005. Time spent with family, contributing to the community, and pursuing individual interests is genuinely valued.

Organisations and leadership needs to be adaptive

Justitia understands that employees' needs vary and may change daily, or at short notice. Justitia manages this by ensuring there are always at least two lawyers who are familiar with a client file and can respond to queries at any time.

Broaden the definition of success

The pressure of budgets and billable hours can impede the development of a cooperative, collegiate work environment. Lawyers are reluctant to share information and work if they won't receive recognition or fees for it. Team performance indicators should take preference over individual indicators, so lawyers are rewarded for working together.

Justitia will continue to advocate for the best practices in workplaces generally and in its areas of expertise, as well as providing an alternative successful work model for law firms.

www.justitia.com.au

The Victorian Workplace Mental Wellbeing Collaboration is a partnership between SuperFriend, VicHealth and WorkSafe Victoria. We are working together to help workplaces create positive and supportive work cultures and environments by focusing on organisational leadership and encouraging workplaces to implement positive mental wellbeing strategies that enhance existing policies and processes.

For more information, please visit:
www.leadingwellvic.com.au

Published February 2017