

# Driving change at Keoghs



# An innovative approach to client account management

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Business development director, Tony Barker



## Driving change at Keoghs: an innovative approach to client account management.

Keoghs LLP is a very different type of legal practice. Operated as a commercial business and with a management structure similar to those of its client base, Keoghs is one of the foremost insurance litigation firms in the UK, acting for more than 60 insurance clients. The practice is recognised today as one of the most innovative and forward-thinking around and, as a result, has seen unprecedented growth in recent years.

Yet this very success has brought with it new problems, demanding a similarly radical approach to client account management and development if the practice is to continue to achieve its ambitious sales and profit targets.

Business development director, Tony Barker, puts it this way: *“In order to make this happen, one of the things we had to do was develop a much larger internal pool of proactive and flexible account managers, by identifying employees from across the whole practice that evidenced the aptitude, enthusiasm and potential for this key role.”*

For Keoghs, external training has formed a critical part of the resulting integrated two-year

skills development programme. And, in working with behaviour change specialist, Huthwaite Legal, this huge commitment is already well on the way to paying off, by building a strong client account management team capable of meeting the challenges of tomorrow’s fast-changing legal services landscape.

## Breaking with tradition

For Barker, who joined Keoghs in 2007 after a career in the insurance and IT industries, it was clear that a more traditional approach to client account management, favoured by many law firms, would not achieve the level of change required.

*“Client account management responsibility has been allocated typically on the basis of an experienced lawyer’s existing relationship with the client,”* he asserts, *“rather than a natural talent for business development. In addition, little or no training is provided and it has remained a part-time role, to be undertaken alongside the partner’s or solicitor’s fee-earning responsibilities.”*

*“By contrast, we recognised that to be successful, not only did we need to build upon strong client relationships, but also leverage these more effectively to get the best value from them.”*

For Barker, the answer lay in the firm recognising the importance

of sales and client account management within the broader business and raising its profile, not only as a function, but also as a career development path. *“To support our rapid growth, we have to overcome the dual problems of a lack of client account management skills and capacity,”* he confirms. *“This is crucial if we are to continue successfully bringing on board new clients and building the account teams required to manage effectively the complex multiple relationships that exist within major clients.”*

Therefore with the approval of the board, Barker invited applications from anyone interested across the practice – in both fee earning and non-fee earning roles - to attend a rigorous assessment centre. In response, some 40 staff took part in the selection process, from which ten were chosen to join the extended client account development programme.

*“We knew the kind of behaviours and motivation we were looking for, including basic interpersonal skills such as the ability to sell themselves, ask questions and interact with clients in the right way,”* says Barker. *“Having established this, we were willing to invest in their futures by providing a comprehensive two-year programme of skills improvement, including selling high value services and client account development.”*

*“It was important to recognise the broader importance of client account management within the practice. And we could do this, for example, by reducing the successful applicant’s fee-earning targets, where relevant, in order for them to undertake the Client Account Manager (CAM) role effectively - and supporting this with effective sales management.”*

Barker also understood the importance of getting buy-in from their clients if this highly innovative approach were to work. *“It can be argued that an account manager does not need a legal background to sell legal services effectively,”* he says. *“However, many insurance companies’ claims teams have a more traditional view of the lawyer/client relationship and so one of our selection criteria was that applicants had at least five years’ experience delivering services in a law firm.”*

## **External training support**

A central element in the delivery of the programme was to identify a training provider who understood and could create a bespoke, flexible programme to meet Keogh’s demanding criteria. Following a detailed review of what the market offered, Barker chose Huthwaite Legal as best placed to provide the more rounded sales and commercial

development approach the practice required.

*“We wanted to learn from and apply best-practice selling techniques from across all sectors,”* Barker confirms. *“Members of our HR team had previous positive experience of Huthwaite Legal: in addition, it offered the ideal combination of specialist legal sector experience and SPIN<sup>®</sup>, a strong research-based sales methodology for selling high value services – such as legal services - which was recognised internationally across all commercial sectors, including those of our clients.”*

*“Equally importantly, the Huthwaite Legal team understood and bought into what we were trying to do and were willing to work flexibly with us to achieve it.”*

As a result, Keoghs and Huthwaite Legal worked closely to develop a tailored programme which reflected the common lack of sales skills of those taking part in the CAM programme, the breadth of their backgrounds and their existing client relationship experience.

*“What emerged was a developmental process which included regular external training sessions as well as other activities to embed and reinforce what participants were learning. The programme sought to build on the latent sales ability of those taking part,”* recalls Kate

Fleming, director Huthwaite Legal.

*“Our objective was to embed a series of core skills, including relationship skills, basic sales ability, interpersonal and communications skills, client account management and development and competitive selling strategies. These are key requirements for selling high value services in highly competitive environments which typically have a large number of influencers and decision-makers involved in appointing lawyers or in continuing to instruct them”.*

In response, Huthwaite Legal worked closely with Barker to ensure that the role-plays and other training materials reflected closely the day-to-day experience of the participants. The programme formed part of a tightly-integrated framework of internal coaching and reinforcement sessions, designed to take the skills and behaviours learned and apply them in delivering the Keoghs proposition.

For Huthwaite Legal, the result has been a uniquely innovative and ambitious, yet totally pragmatic, approach to selling legal services. *“There is no doubt that Keoghs is investing heavily in account development, as key to the firm’s future development,”* she says. *“This is not unique to the insurance industry and the Keoghs approach could be applied to any area of legal*



*“Huthwaite Legal has delivered a highly professional and flexible set of bespoke modules which, supported by on-going coaching and reinforcement, has helped create a group of highly enthused individuals who are using the new skills and behaviours learned on a daily basis.”*

*services, with equal success.”*

*“It recognises that not everyone can be good at sales. Yet, if an organisation wants to achieve its growth objectives, it must recognise the central importance of selling and client development and so target training and skills development activity at those individuals with the enthusiasm, commitment and basic aptitude to build strong client relationships and leverage the value from them.”*

*“It is essential to ensure that this is backed up by the right processes, practice-wide support and mechanisms for rewarding sales success. So, in improving sales management, for example, it must recognise that competitive tendering is a strategic sales activity and not simply an administrative function requiring the production of a pitch document.”*

*“Organisations in other market sectors have embraced this approach to sales for many years and now law firms have to adopt the same strategic approach,” she adds. “Today, sales and client account management is a key management function and not just a ‘nice to have’ when time allows.”*

## **Measuring success**

Six months into the external training programme, Barker is satisfied with progress to-date: *“Huthwaite Legal has delivered a highly professional and flexible set of bespoke modules which, supported by on-going coaching and reinforcement, has helped create a group of highly enthused individuals who are using the new skills and behaviours learned on a daily basis.”*

*“As a result, some are already taking lead responsibility with a number of smaller accounts. Others are assuming deputy account responsibility, or as part of the management team in larger accounts, and learning directly from highly-experienced account managers in the Keoghs team.”*

Barker is strongly results-driven and fully anticipates a measurable return for this substantial training investment from now on. This will include improved levels of client retention and growth in line with established Keoghs development targets, together with a positive impact on the practice’s client satisfaction scores.

*“We have started our new financial year,” he confirms, “with budgets, targets and account objectives now in place. The marketplace is tough, without doubt, but I am confident that*

*with Huthwaite Legal’s continuing expertise and flexible support, we have the best possible template to meet our ambitious growth targets and continue the Keoghs success story.”*



Keoghs





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