More Than Knowing The Law

Small firm, big changes and the impact of COVID

Join LPLC’s Chief Risk Manager Heather Hibberd and Helen Suke, Principal at Suke and Associates - a boutique family law firm that specialises in complex property settlements - as they reflect on the challenges brought about by the COVID pandemic and discuss the changes her firm has had to embrace in order to adapt and succeed.

The conversation delves into what worked, what didn’t, and what lessons to take into the future.

Practitioners in small to medium firms will find this episode provides helpful insights on managing changes in how your team approaches work during COVID and beyond.

In this episode we discuss:

* The future of hybrid working
* The challenges and how one firm overcame them
* The importance of investing in good IT systems
* The impact the pandemic has had on new lawyers and their learning

**In this episode, you will discover:**

* **How was the transition to working from home for the team at Suke & Associates?**
  + **"***The team's concern was that most of them traveled to the city by train, and that's how the infection was likely to be spread. And they were concerned that if it came into the office, then the whole team would suffer.*"
  + "*We were very fortunate that when we set up the new practice, we spent a lot on our IT. We invested heavily on it. And everything's cloud-based. So it was just a matter of literally picking up our iPads and going home.*"

* **How did working remotely for you affect the culture of your organization?**
  + “*I think initially there was a bit of excitement, you know, like, 'Hey, we can do this.' This is really exciting, how amazing that we could all work at home. So there was a lot of energy around that, that we could easily retrieve our documents, that we could prepare documents for clients, it was still seamless. That was the first lockdown.*"
  + "*The second lockdown was harder. Whilst we could work in that way, it takes a lot of energy. The number of emails exponentially rises. Even being on Zoom, it's more tiring on Zoom if you've got a full day in a mediation or a full day in court on and off Zoom, it takes a lot more energy.”*
  + “*Younger lawyers feel that they're missing out on osmotic learning opportunities. One of my lawyers said to me, ‘Look, Helen, I love it. When I'm in your office, if you're having a phone call about a matter, I can hear the way you're handling the phone call, or how you're answering the questions or how you're managing the clients expectations or responding to their needs*.”

* **Are there three practical tips you could give our listeners on how to deal with the sort of hybrid work environment that we're likely to see in the future?**
  + “*Communication has to be number one - we have to be particularly intentional about that. Working from home can be very productive in certain circumstances, it can enhance people's lifestyle, but we have to be very careful about keeping everybody within the group as well, supporting them and that they are a part of a team.”*
  + “*Really thinking about the team, what is required to initially glue a team together and keep them glued together. That will be a challenge going forward if this is the way we are going to continue working, because with different personalities, you've got to cater for how they come into a group and how they integrate into a group.”*
  + *“Working remotely on Zoom for a number of introverts really helped them to be seen and it helped them to come forward and it maybe made them feel more comfortable to be involved. One of my staff members expressed that working remotely actually brought out the best in them. So, good learnings!”*

* **Will this hybrid working arrangement actually encourage proactive, deliberate supervision, as people deliberately have communication with others rather than learning by osmosis?**
  + “*It would very much depend on the team and the firm. In firms where it didn't happen before, it would probably happen less when you're in a hybrid situation when you have people that are remote, that are not as visible. But there are great opportunities to support and supervise people well when they're working remotely.*”

* **With many firms now adopting more agile and remote working arrangements and making use of shared space, what impact do you think that will have on confidentiality?**
  + *“We're hearing a lot of firms saying, maybe we can break up our team into hubs, like hubs that people that work in particular suburbs together, and that they can go to a shared workspace.“*
  + *“There are things we have to be conscious of, how we maintain that confidentiality for clients. We were always taught as young lawyers, you don't take files home, or if you take a file home, that you sort of guard it with your life, straight to home, do the work, straight back to the office.”*
  + *“I think those principles need to be thought about again, but in the electronic sort of world, you've got to be very careful that you're in a space where nobody can overhear your telephone conversation, and that you keep your records well-guarded.”*

**More resources from LPLC**

[Risk Management for COVID weary lawyers](https://lplc.com.au/resources/lij-article/risk-management-for-covid-weary-lawyers)

[Step up supervision in times of crisis](https://lplc.com.au/resources/lij-article/step-up-supervision-in-times-of-crisis)

[See all LPLC supervision resources](https://lplc.com.au/risk-advice/find-resources?areas=131875)

[LIV Health & Wellbeing](https://www.liv.asn.au/Professional-Practice/Supporting-You/Health-and-Wellbeing/For-You)