



**Meridian West**

# **Case study:**

## **Embedding commerciality and behaviour change at Coffin Mew**

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## *Background: Finding a point of differentiation for an ambitious, mid-sized firm*

Coffin Mew, a medium-sized, ambitious law firm based on the South Coast of England wanted to differentiate its service by delivering commercially savvy advice to its clients on a more consistent basis. By rolling-out a programme designed to foster commercial competencies the firm has benefited from real, measurable improvements in financial performance and client feedback scores.

“We are using commerciality as one of our unique selling points,” explains Miles Brown, CEO at Coffin Mew. “We have no intentions of being one of the UK’s largest law firms, but we are not a niche player. We strongly believe that true commerciality, matched with a detailed understanding of our clients’ business, and embedded into the DNA of our firm, will give Coffin Mew an edge in a crowded market.”

The firm’s clients include large corporates, entrepreneurs, owner-managed businesses, banks and investors, as well as wealthy individuals and families. The desire for a more commercially savvy approach was felt across each of these client segments. “Clients love working with us and rely upon the support we give them. But our client feedback suggested that we were struggling to get the message across about the value we bring, and that is an important part of our offer,” says Miles. “Clients told us we could do better and we listened.”

What did clients really want from Coffin Mew? “Our clients told us they want us to understand their business better and to give advice that is commercially rooted in their business,” says Miles. “I don’t think lawyers are naturally the most commercially-minded people, but we felt we couldn’t ignore the message emerging consistently from our clients.”

## *Our solution: commerciality workshops to support behaviour change*

As a result, Coffin Mew mandated that all its staff, from trainees through to senior management, participate in workshops designed and facilitated by Meridian West and Kommercialize. These workshops addressed the commercial skills gaps in the firm and were designed to generate action plans for improvement. “Our staff have been coached on scoping, service delivery and pricing techniques, and how to understand clients’ business objectives better,” explains Miles. As part of the programme, all staff were split into teams, with partners mixing with junior lawyers, trainees and support staff to understand how to deliver coordinated commercial advice. “We thought hard about the strengths and weaknesses of the firm, using our recent client feedback to trigger ideas,” he says.

The role of Miles and other leaders within the firm has been to encourage behavioural and cultural change, and to ensure good practices are replicated. One mechanism for achieving this is the use of firm-wide and personal action plans to keep commerciality centre-stage. Another strategy the management have taken is to coordinate with HR experts in the firm. “We are working closely with HR to implement commerciality into the competency framework, so all fee-earners are judged on it,” Miles explains.

***The results: a stronger reputation and pitch win rate at Coffin Mew***

The benefits for Coffin Mew have been significant. "In our pitch documents we now talk about our commercial focus, saying 'this is how we do it' and 'this is what it means'. We use commerciality as a guiding principle," says Miles. Coffin Mew have won more work by taking this approach. "We recently won our biggest ever client," acknowledges Miles. "The General Counsel we pitched to thought our proposal, which evidences our commercial approach, was the best he had ever read."

Miles believes the deliberate focus on commerciality has also helped promote Coffin Mew's reputation among other professional firms: "When we have gone out to referrers, such as accountants, banks, and independent financial advisers, they have been really impressed. They are all facing the same issues that we are and are keen to find out how we have addressed commerciality in our firm."

Case study adapted from Alastair Beddow, Ben Kent and Adrian Furner, *The Professional Services Leadership Handbook* (Kogan Page: 2017): <https://www.koganpage.com/product/professional-services-leadership-handbook-9780749477349>

