



Collective conscious

Globalise firmwide approaches to talent management

Strategy 101

Create a firmwide strategy

Flexible service

Launch a new service model

Make it stick

Embed a risk management culture

Career winner

Why let your future be a lottery? Take control by developing a portfolio career, say Patricia Wheatley Burt and Chrissie Lightfoot

With mergers, de-mergers, bolt-ons and lateral hires, these days partners not only have to deliver services congruent to their firm's brands, but also to their own personal brands. Some people believe the two have to be separated or are mutually exclusive, but that is not the case.

By having visible personal brands, individual partners add distinguishing characteristics to their firms' brands in a highly competitive marketplace. Partners with additional interests to those of the law build more commercial and entrepreneurial approaches, to the benefit of their clients and firms.

Career-proof yourself

The concept of a job for life has become obsolete. It suited the working methods of the 19th and 20th centuries, but it is increasingly unlikely in the modern world.

Outsourcing, technology, the global economy and societal changes are driving different work patterns, including the physical ability and financial necessity of working well into one's 70s.

The secret to creating the lifestyle, job satisfaction and financial rewards one craves in the present and future is to focus on building a portfolio of business via a personal brand. This is done by matching one's portfolio of skills, professional ethics, interests, strengths and talents with the needs, wants and desires of potential clients and the firm.

Some firms may not be able to support or justify expensive full-time fee earners. Equally, individuals may not want or be able to work full time. Having several strings to your bow is a long-term investment in a fulfilled life that is career-proofed and not

vulnerable to the vagaries of the economy or the firm's board. The kudos you gain from these activities will generate more referrers, clients and business for the firm – as well as for yourself in the long term.

Multi-trick portfolio

While a portfolio career requires a multitude of skills, the more skills you learn, have and hone, the more prepared you will be to take advantage of new opportunities and to take control of your future.

Acquiring a portfolio of skills for different roles could stand you in good stead for whatever future you decide to pursue and lifestyle to sculpt. Taking on non-executive director (NED) or trustee roles, for example, is usually seen as something only very senior lawyers do. However, anyone can develop multi-tracked careers and interests.

Nonetheless, it is best to check what the firm's policy is, as some see NEDs and other activities as a conflict of interests,

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What is a portfolio career? It is a rejection of the old single profession model. A portfolio career enables an individual to create multiple revenue streams and keep pace with the economy. For example, being a lawyer and something else at the same time.

It's like having a portfolio of investments in yourself. Rather than putting all of your eggs in one basket and being a one-trick pony, you can spread the risk and increase your opportunities by diversifying.

Maintaining a portfolio of different careers can pay off in terms of time, money and quality of life. By scaling back some of the time you spend on your main career, you can have the time and freedom to develop other strings in your bow and to pursue other interests (see box: 'Benefits of a portfolio career').

or insist that permission has to be granted by the partnership. Any income generated will likely belong to the firm but, post-retirement, will belong to the individual. The key is to ensure you allow sufficient time to build your experience and not leave it till the day before you retire.

Look up from the grindstone

Alarmingly, too many high-achieving partners suddenly wake up aged 55+ and realise they are now perceived as 'past it'. Having dedicated their lives to the firm, they are expected to either keep performing at the same high pace or to ship out.

If you are at the peak of your career – not just meeting but exceeding your targets – now is the time to look at where you are going to be in the next decade or two.



For example, Burness' chairman, Philip Rodney, took on the additional role of chairman of the Glasgow School of Art in 2010. This is more than giving something back to the community: he is gaining experiences that ultimately benefit his firm.

When in time he decides to move on from the firm, he will also have a bank of experience and a breadth of skills that will enable him to undertake another interesting role.

Align brands

Many firms drive their business development strategies through sectors, making it easier for individuals to build their personal presence, balanced with their personal interests.

If this is planned as part of the department's marketing strategy, all of the networking events attended, articles written and seminar sessions delivered will converge to deliver the goal of generating a higher profile for the

individual and driving clients and referrers to the firm.

All of this takes time, needs to be juggled around fee earning and involves trial and error. There is no one way to approach or develop the right answers, as it is very individualistic. The choice is yours and, if you wait to be asked, or are not organised enough, you will not progress far. In fact, it is clear that this approach is not suitable for everyone.

However, a good starting point is to:

BENEFITS OF A PORTFOLIO CAREER

- ✓ You decide when, how and on what you work.
- ✓ You can develop, hone and use your portfolio skills across different careers.
- ✓ You can structure work around your lifestyle.
- ✓ You get to pick and choose your attitude to work.
- ✓ You allow yourself the freedom to pursue something you feel close to (or drawn to).
- ✓ You make room for all of the things you want to be in your life.
- ✓ You create the space to fulfil your dreams.
- ✓ You have the opportunity to make yourself feel happy and fulfilled.
- ✓ You get to spread your well-honed portfolio of skills across different roles, bringing increased long-term security.

1. fully understand what your key skills and competencies are, assessed against the commercial world (rather than as a lawyer or partner);
2. identify how to plug any gaps by skills development or getting involved in projects within the firm;
3. become a volunteer in your chosen sector so that you learn what issues are faced, enabling you to know what expertise is valued; and
4. do this in more than one area/sector, to increase credibility and networks.

For example, Simon Wethered, who specialised in charity law while at Charles Russell, is now a consultant to the firm, in addition to being a trustee of St Martin's Christmas Appeal Fund and the Leche Trust, which add up to a busy life post-retirement.

Having a genuine interest and passion for a sector is also essential. For example, Richard Linsell (recently retired from

Addleshaw Goddard) is well known for his NED involvement with DHL International and Sunseekers International.

Developing firmwide policies and practices around this is tricky, as taking this approach to career management will not suit everyone (all the better, some would say). Options to consider include:

- ensuring the selection criteria in all roles includes skills beyond the role;
- allocating time codes to skills development activities;
- discounting fee-earning time to what should be seen as business development;
- actively encouraging individuals to have interests and activities outside of the firm (and ensuring alignment of these with the firm's profile);
- providing mentoring and coaching; and
- assessing relevant activities within performance appraisals.



Firms should consider how to introduce such approaches in a tiered fashion by adopting fast-track approaches for anyone with less than five years to retirement, as well as more measured and paced approaches for younger members.

Choice and control

Ultimately, taking advantage of all of the options available to develop your personal brand will provide you with the freedom, choice and independence to take control of your future and determine your career path in the long term. ¹¹¹

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