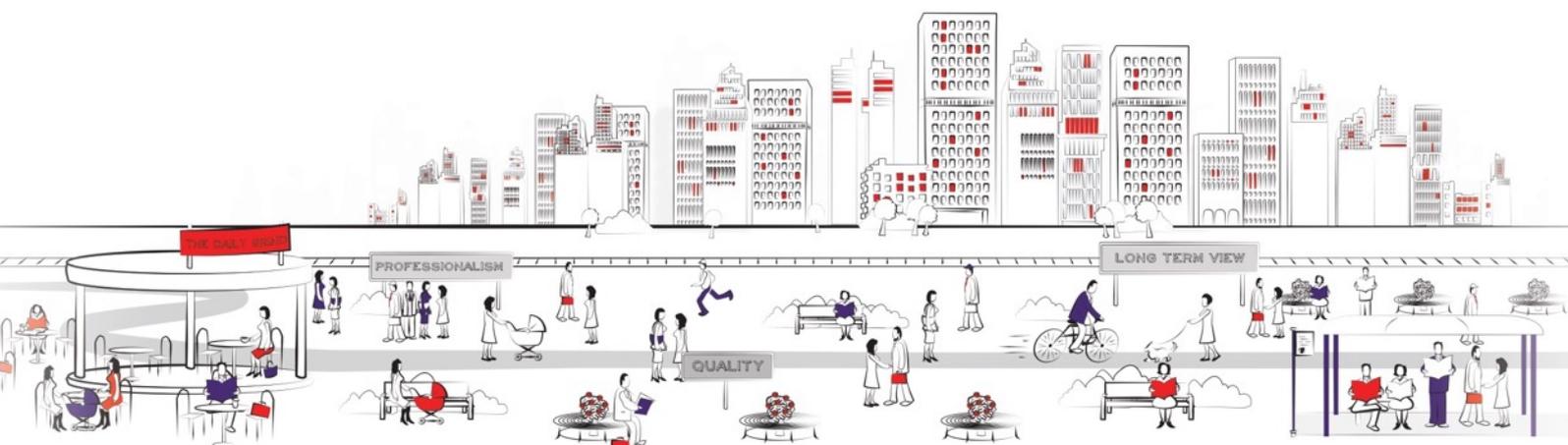


# Eggs Can't Fly:

*Why it is important to manage your career*

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This paper summarises a presentation given by Phil Jepson to the ProManchester Business of Law event held on 12th March 2015 at the office of Gateley in Manchester.

## Introduction

A career in the law used to be a very simple thing. Law firms were similar to each other and clients wanted pretty much the same things. That has all changed.

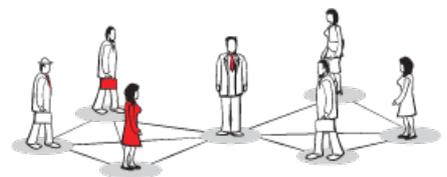
Law is now a complex and dynamic market. Even change is not constant. The legal market now attracts a wide range of people with vastly different ambitions, hopes and expectations. Success is not inevitable.

Lawyers need to have an idea of what they want, develop a plan and then give themselves the skills and experience they need. **For each of us it is our own responsibility to manage our own career.**

We will look at the changing market, what businesses want from their people and how lawyers can find their way.

*Eggs cannot fly, but birds can. To succeed you need to gather the right skills and experiences to take the right advice.*

*If you want to fly you need to grow wings.*



## Relationships.

Legal practices historically were relationship businesses.

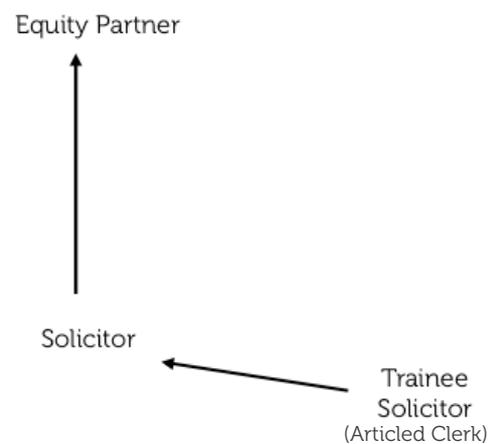
Solicitors received work through word of mouth and referral.

There was little use of systems or processes, each case was treated individually.



## How everything used to be.

It was a simple, everyone followed the same path.



## What Changed?

### 1986 transformed the legal market.

Two major events were the Big Bang, the deregulation of the financial services markets and the change in regulation which meant solicitors could advertise. This led to larger firms and larger markets.

The idea emerged that if a lawyer did a narrower range of work, it could be higher quality, better, faster and good for clients. Firms began to create specialised departments with more specialist lawyers.

As firms grew they needed more management. We began to see full time Managing Partners and firms with Boards. The modern law firm was born.

Clients began to work out that they were buying in bulk and that a lot of services could be standardised. We began to see more awareness from clients and greater competition for work between firms. This created downward pressure on fees.

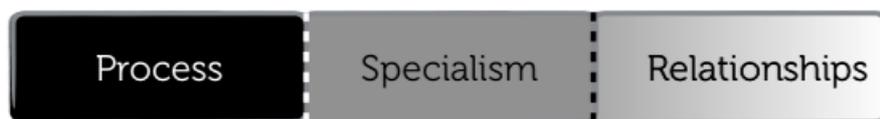
Firms needed to find ways to deliver work at lower prices but also at lower cost therefore maintaining profit.

They started to use more systems and processes. By making each job more narrow, they use lower skilled, less experienced people, whilst retaining quality.

*Firms must understand the type of clients they are serving, the service they expect and what they will pay.*

## Relationships, Specialism, Process

Historically the three elements existed as a continuum. Each lawyer had to provide a mix of the three.



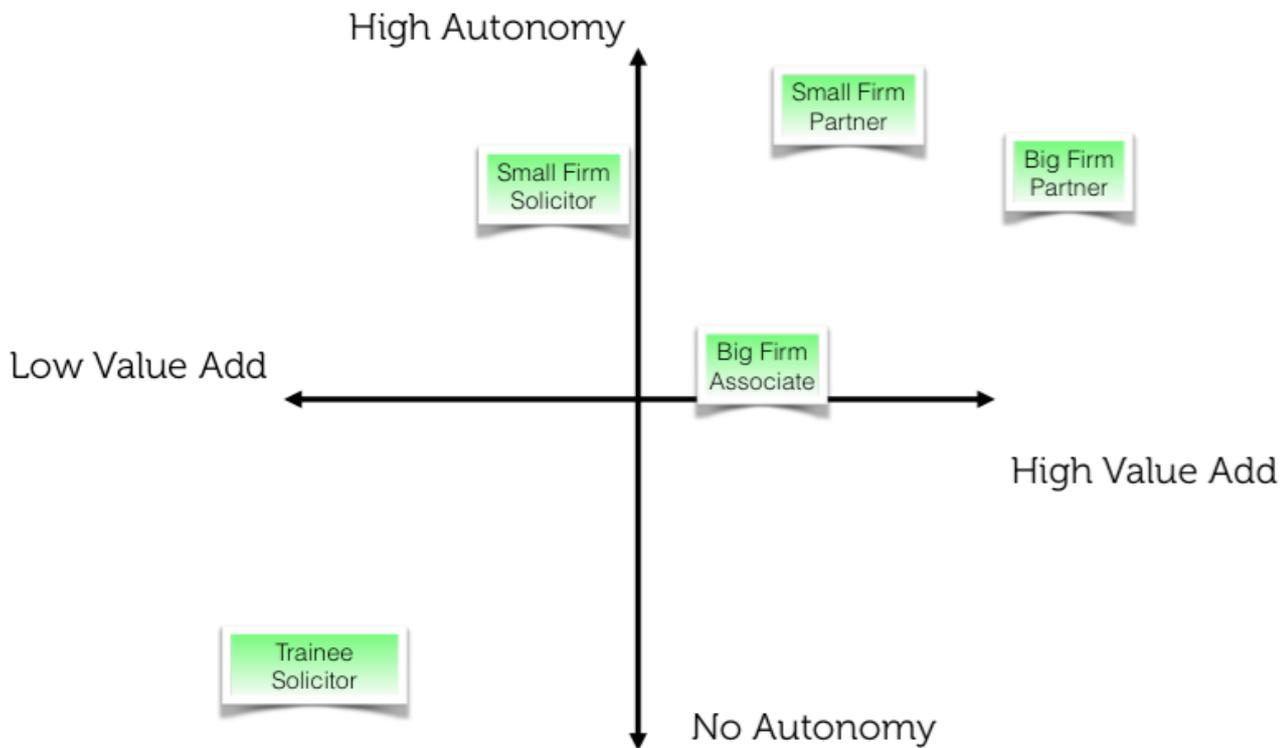
As businesses developed commercially they began to create demarcation and focus. Some lawyers and departments became specialists, some managed relationships and some set up and ran processes.

Now there are entire businesses which are almost exclusively focussed on one of the three areas.

-  Small firms - Relationships. Refer very complex work.
-  Big firms - very focussed on specialist departments and specialist lawyers. Some element of relationship. Growing element of process.
-  Process Firms - PI - Conveyancing

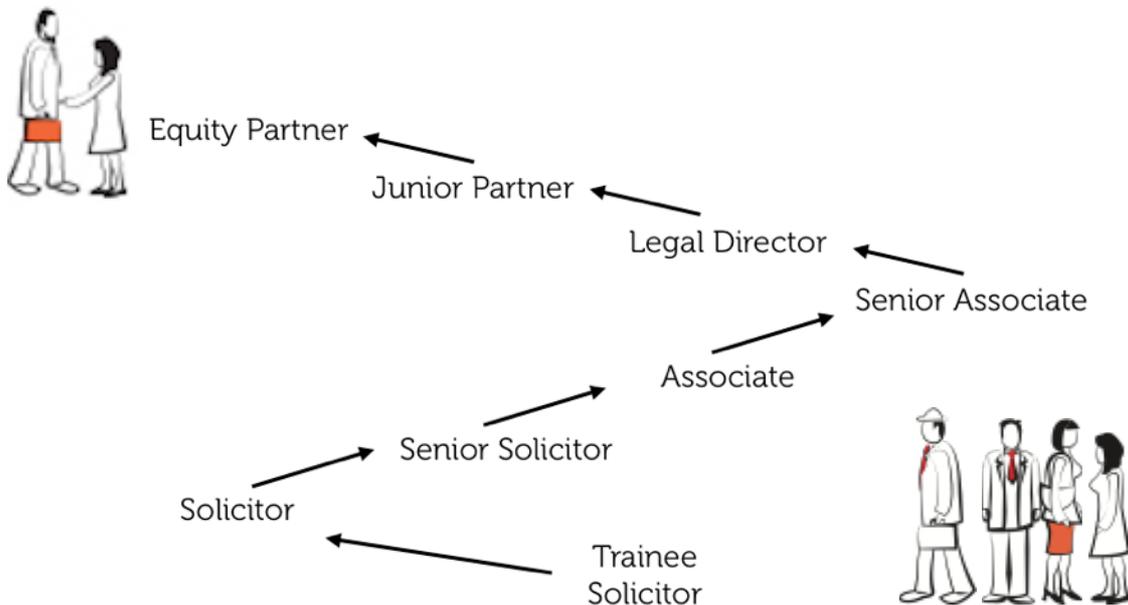
For a lawyer trying to build their career, the splitting of the three elements makes it difficult because mastery of one doesn't help with the others. In different types of firms the mix of skills required is becoming very different.

### Value adding depends on the business model.



As well as skills and experience, different types of roles give different levels of autonomy. Being a Small Firm Solicitor will give a higher level of autonomy than a Big Firm Associate, however a lower level of value. It is about context and what you want to achieve, not everyone will want to reach the top-right of the graph; the Big Firm Partner.





It used to be simple, everyone followed pretty much the same path.

Now it's very different. Besides having the right mix of skills, a lawyer has a very long career ladder to negotiate. Not everyone wants to be or can be a partner.

In a corporate structure there are even fewer spaces at the top.

The challenge is to manage aspirations and provide a rewarding environment for those who will not progress.

This is even more so post Legal Services Act because there are now a wider variety of businesses.

New entrants and a wider range of business structures have resulted in a much wider range of good firms, small, medium and large.



## The Game

What your firm wants from you and what you want from them are different things.

The Firm	You
Pay as little as possible	Earn as much as possible
Record a lot of hours	Have a life
Keep you down the ladder	Move up the ladder
Build job enhancing skills	Build career enhancing skills
Generate clients for the firm	Generate clients for yourself

This is not personal and does not reflect negatively on any particular firm. It is just important to recognise that the firm has a different agenda to that of the individual lawyer who is trying to make their way within it.



## Launching your Career

### You've got to have a plan

Would you build a house without a plan? You could, but it will either be a very basic, pretty irregular and most likely a bit of mess.

Any reasonable business decision begins with a plan. Setting out a long term strategy, mid-term goals and short term tactics. Just 'winging it' in a business world makes no sense, everything has to be planned when large values are on the line. Why should your career be any different, your career can be the most valuable thing you build.

Times have changed from when if you simply did your job well for a number of years, your career would take care of itself. The inevitable progression from Trainee Solicitor to Partner.

This is no longer the case. Your career will no longer take care of itself and your firm will not take care of it either - it's not their business nor their concern to take care of your career.

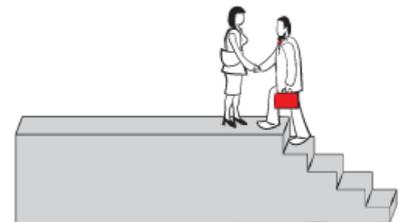
Sadly, many young lawyers don't seem to grasp that **You**, and only you, can lay out the foundations of your career plan.

*You need to create a plan to build your dream home,  
just as you need to create a plan to build your dream career.*

### Start with yourself (be honest)

*What do you love doing?*

*What do you loathe doing?*



Note the terminology, it's not about simple likes, dislikes or preferences; you've got to find your passion. You spend too much of your life at work not to have a passion for what you do. You cannot be making compromises.

Successful businesses have a mission, vision and values - this should be no different for people.

Ask yourself:

- ◆ What is your motive? (your purpose in life).
- ◆ What is your vision? (where do you see yourself going).
- ◆ What are your morals? (what matters to you and guides your actions).

Your starting point should be; **what do you want from your life?** Build your plan around this.

However, this isn't something you can decided on a whim, it takes a lot of thought. Career wise, you need to know what you love to do, and in comparison detest doing. This love is what will get you out of bed each morning, so you have to be sure it is what you want to build your career on.

For many it is unfamiliar territory and will take time.

Psychometric tests can help to reveal ourselves. Myers Briggs, Belbin and 360 profiling can give surprisingly accurate results. The internet if a fantastic tool, there are many online resources.

## What's out there?

### Within your company

What potential is there where you currently are?

- ◆ What is likely to be available for you?
- ◆ What is coming up in the near future for your firm?
- ◆ Where is it going in the current market?
- ◆ What lies in the more distant future?

The big question is, **is there a place for you in these plans?** What, if anything will be available to you? Is it enough and do you want it enough to secure it?



If you are unsure, get yourself into a position so that you can see better, build a network around the firm and get in the know.

### Beyond your company

Understand what else is out there, don't work inside a bubble.

- ◆ Scan the horizon - determine what is happening in the wider market.
- ◆ How are other firms positioning themselves, can they offer opportunities more suited to you?

The easiest and most obvious way is to keep up to date with the legal press, scan through *The Lawyer*, *The Gazette* and various online blogs. Read about issues and firms that interest you, it doesn't always have to be relevant to your career, just take an interest in the overall legal picture.

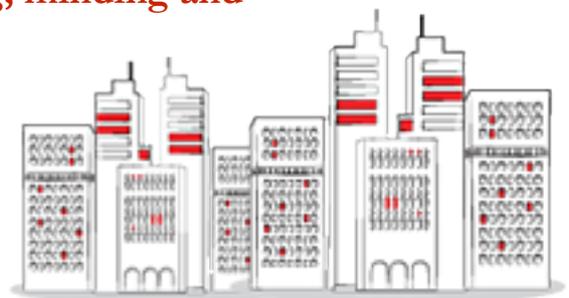
Attend events that can keep you up to date, such as relevant free conferences. Some relevant events will inevitably be further afield or paid for. Find out if your firm attends or has a membership, you could ask or put a business case forward as to why you should attend.

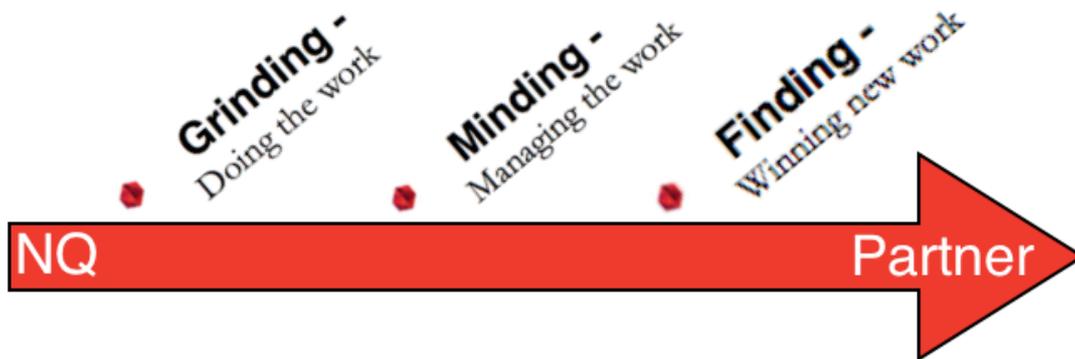
*Stay in touch with us. We will always help you with career advice. We are advisors, not a recruitment agency. Like you, we are in it for the long haul.*

## The basic tasks of a lawyer

### The three basic tasks of a lawyer – grinding, minding and finding

The further up the career path you go, the less of the former and more of the latter you will do.





A trap many younger lawyers fall into is believing partnership will be your reward for being an excellent grinder. It won't. Lower down the career path you are paid to grind, that's your job. Serious promotion occurs when you show that you have the capacity of mind and the potential thereafter to manage the work, then to win new work.

Before the thought of how you would go out there and find new work, you have to ask yourself the big question, **do you really want to be a partner?** Put another way; do you really want to own your own business?

For many of us lawyers it can seem like the whole point, the end of the game we've been playing our whole career. But is it really?

Law attracts the high achievers - highly intelligent, driven and focused individuals. The idea of being a partner plays to that. It indicates achievement, arrival and top of the tree success. We don't often look beyond that symbolism to the reality.

You are moving from the relative security of employment to the precariousness of being self-employed.

The beauty of the current legal marketplace is that it's not a case, in most firms, of up the ladder or out. There are now so many other career destinations for lawyers than partner. However, maybe your dream still is to be a partner at the top of the ladder. Either way it does not matter:

*You and only you have to make it happen.*

## Career Development Plan (CDP)

### Goals, objectives & tactics

How do things happen in business? By writing and then implementing a business plan; personal career planning should be no different.

You may already have a CDP with your employer. But remember who is in charge there. Very often, a work-generated CDP is relatively short term; often just for the next 12 months. It isn't really about your career but about ensuring your employer achieves its business objectives, sometimes, this can be simply ensuring that it hits budget.

You need to develop is a personal CDP; but where to begin?

### Develop your Goal

Your overall vision of where or what you want to be needs to be at the forefront. This goal will drive the plan and aid in creation of the strategy for achieving it.

Decide what your overall goal(s) will be, do you want to become a partner, an equity partner or something completely different.

Set a realistic timeframe on it, for example to retire by 50 is realistic, 35 not so much. Time sets your strategy apart from the pipe dream, you now have a timeframe in which to achieve your goal(s).

### Develop your Objectives

Now you must develop the strategy to get you there. Work backwards setting yourself objectives. These will be key points along the way which you will need to pass to achieve your goal. Adding dates to these will keep you on track and can be useful to measure your progress, as well as acting as psychological rewards along the way.

If the overall goal is to be an equity partner in 10 years, then an objective could be to become a salaried partner /senior associate in X years, etc. A realistic date will help develop this into the outline of your career plan.



## Develop your tactics

Once the key points and dates are in place you need to insert your tactics into the strategy. These are more small-scale, short term, SMART steps needed to reach the objective(s). Diarise these to keep them at the forefront of your mind and decision making on a weekly or even daily basis.

So, if one of your key points is to be recognised as a leading authority on X, your tactics might include getting involved in delivering training sessions with clients and/or delivering training on new developments to your team, and/or delivering a breakfast briefing, and/or working with the marketing team at developing your firm's SM presence in relation to X, and/or starting blogging on the subject.

For each of those tactics (with dates) you may need to set sub-tactics (also with dates) – e.g. if you're going to start delivering training to clients, what personal skills/competencies will you need to do this.



## Bridging the Skills Gap

Now you have your goals, along with a strategy of how to achieve them through your objectives and tactics. The remaining question is how to take those steps?

You will need to carry out an honest skills audit, this is:

- ❖ What skills do you have to be able to get you where you want to go?
- ❖ How developed are those skills? Do you need to work on them?
- ❖ What skills do you still need?

You will have to be honest with yourself, you can't rely on your employer to do this for you. Think about the following skills:



-  **Business skills:**  
Finance, pricing, budgeting, billing, cash flow, business planning, project management, report writing, strategy
-  **Sales skills:**  
Sales, marketing, lead generation, negotiating, presentation/pitching, clinching the deal.
-  **IT skills:**  
Never mind Word – think Excel and data management, case management, research database expertise, social media, coding.
-  **People skills:**  
Managing others within your business (downwards, across and up), managing clients (CRM).
-  **Client/Business Development skills:**  
Networking, working the room, building relationships of trust, cross-selling.
-  **Personal skills:**  
Assertiveness, persuasiveness, time-management, leadership, innovation/creative thinking, resilience.

There's a tendency for firm-led training to be a 'sheep dip' affair, this may or may not give you the skills you need to develop your career.

You need to work out what training you need. There are plenty of free resources out there, but sometimes this could come at a cost.

*Think of it as an investment into your future.*

## Keeping to your plan

Keeping to your career plan is much the same as how would you keep to a diet or exercise regime. Constantly looking in the mirror and checking against the plan; are you on target? What adjustments do you need to make?

Look to build a support network: friends, HR, your supervisor. Try to find a mentor.

*Stay in touch with us. We will always help you with career advice. We are advisors, not a recruitment agency. Like you, we are in it for the long haul.*

## You're on your own

Unfortunately, your firm, supervisor and HR partner all have their own agenda; the growth of the firm. This may or may not coincide with the growth of your career, but leaving it to them is a chance you cannot afford to take. You need to be in control of your own career growth.

**No one else is going to do this for you!**

**No one else is taking care of your career!**

*To end with, remember; stick to your plan.*



## A little about Phil:



### Phil Jepson

*Chairman of Jepson Holt & Director of Totuus Consulting*

Phil is a former lawyer and the co founder and Chairman of Jepson Holt which he set up in 2004. Jepson Holt help law firms grow and help lawyers develop their careers. We work with law firms and lawyers across the country and helping lawyers to understand their careers and achieve their aspirations is a key part of what we do. On the surface we help firms find lawyers and lawyers find firms but we cannot do that without building lasting relationships with firms and individuals and helping both to be fulfilled. Building on this experience we are developing a suite of career related tools and products to help lawyers achieve and get what they want from their careers.

For more career development and management advice as well as more information about us, please visit: [www.jepsonholt.com](http://www.jepsonholt.com)

