



**TYLER WILSON**

Partner Career Transition



# Partner Career Transition

## Introduction

Many firms are seeing a growth in the number of partners who want to continue working as partners into their 60's. This is partly fuelled by the financial imperative that has arisen from people living longer and the challenge over the past 10 years of building personal pension pots.

At the same time, changes in age discrimination regulations have resulted in many firms raising their compulsory retirement age, or abandoning it altogether.

## The issue from the firm's perspective

Where senior partners take substantial profit shares but no longer have the drive or ability to generate a commensurate level of fees, three issues can arise:

- » Profitability can be negatively affected.
- » Younger partners can feel they are 'carrying' senior colleagues.
- » Younger and aspiring partners may feel that their route to the top is blocked and look elsewhere for better opportunities for advancement.

Any of these can destabilise a firm and be a risk to its health.

## The issue from the partner's perspective

Senior partners often need to keep earning. They also do not necessarily know what else they could do. It can be a scary prospect to give up the income and status of a law firm partner.

If partners want a second career, they are likely to need to write a CV that does not make significant use of the word 'lawyer'. That requires planning. Optimally, the process needs to start some years before a partner reaches retirement age.

## The challenge

In many firms, the issue of career transition is taboo; there is uncertainty about how to raise it. Senior management fear being perceived as having an agenda to remove partners; partners fear appearing weak or lacking commitment by raising the issue.

## The solutions

Options to address these issues vary. Our observations are:

- » These are important business issues for the firm: how and when partners retire affects everyone at some point. It makes sense to find a way to discuss it openly.
- » There is a real benefit from managing exits effectively, to transition client relationships to the next generation and to achieve an optimal balance between contributions and profit shares.
- » The dialogue needs to support the partners concerned. An invitation to a programme for senior partners needs to be one to attend, not to leave.

- » Timing is crucial: the partner needs to be prepared for the question for the conversation to be effective. A starting point can be a one-off discussion (to raise the issue in their minds) with every partner over a certain age.
- » The most effective help tends to be a combination of one-to-one coaching and access to financial and specialist outplacement support.
- » Partners need to feel they can make their own choices about important aspects of the programme: there is a wide range of motivations, financial needs, family situations, health and fitness etc. among partners in their 50's, and support should be tailored to these.
- » Planning for transition of clients and leadership roles needs to be part of an ongoing dialogue with partners in the later stages of their careers.
- » Because of the personal nature of the issues involved, most of the discussion needs to be with partners on a one-to-one basis.

## How Tyler Wilson can assist

We can:

- » Help senior management prepare a career transition programme, taking responsibility for some aspects that would otherwise fall to Senior/Managing Partners and/or HR Directors.
- » Provide one-to-one support for partners considering their futures outside the firm. This can cover the practicalities of the transition (process, money, skills, CVs, networking, routes to new opportunities) and the effect on the partner on the transition (managing expectations, hopes and fears, rejection and loss).
- » Access specialist financial advice and outplacement support, tailored to individual partner needs.

We can also:

- » Present to partner meetings. It can be helpful to have the issues surrounding career transition raised initially by an outside speaker, who can talk about them generically.
- » Speak at or facilitate group sessions as part of a career transition programme.
- » Advise Senior and Managing Partners on reward and partnership structural issues in relation to partners in their 50's and above.

If you would like a discussion about any aspects of Partner Career Transition, please contact [james@tyler-wilson.co.uk](mailto:james@tyler-wilson.co.uk) or [dick@tyler-wilson.co.uk](mailto:dick@tyler-wilson.co.uk)