

From trainee to managing partner – an interview with Richard Medd

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Tell us about your early experience at Browne Jacobson.

After qualifying, I started as a corporate lawyer wholly focused on the private sector. Browne Jacobson gave me the opportunity after a few years to use those skills to also support Government sector clients. I was blown away by the size and complexity of the projects I got to work on and their direct impact on communities and economies locally and nationally. I've seen time and again how formal partnerships between the public and private sectors have delivered, but also the benefit of good communication, informal connections, and collaboration.

Browne Jacobson is focused on having a positive impact across business and society. What does this mean for a law firm and how does Browne Jacobson do this?

Those of us who work in the legal industry believe that law is at the heart of our society. Protecting the rights of individuals and organisations is so important. As a commercial law firm operating across business and the public sector, at Browne Jacobson, we have the opportunity to make a real impact on our clients, our people and our communities. We've made that a fundamental part of our strategy.

What does that look like in practice?

It's so satisfying for our lawyers to see the direct outcomes of their work changing and improving lives. That could be revitalising communities through major regeneration schemes, creating jobs through corporate investments, helping the NHS navigate the pandemic challenges, protecting intellectual property relating to the development of electric vehicles, supporting schools through major structural change, or advising financial services businesses to ensure they meet their ESG obligations. It really does touch all parts of our business.

In addressing society-wide challenges like climate change and social mobility, good communication between Government and industry, and the use of policy, regulation, and taxation to encourage R&D activity and markets likely to drive those outcomes can be incredibly useful. We as a firm bring our huge experience and knowledge across business and society to that work, but we also love to make those connections and contribute to the debates that will make a real difference.

Equally, as a big business ourselves, we must make a positive impact beyond our client work. Our values are so important to us, and we bring this to life in the firm through our partnerships with our office charities, our diversity and inclusion communities and our environmental group, all run by committed and passionate people at all levels.

How important to you was the culture at Browne Jacobson as you progressed your career with the firm?

The word “culture” means different things to different people but what I’ve experienced throughout my time at the firm is a culture that’s combined a fun working environment with huge support for my development, encouragement to pursue my areas of interest and ambition for the firm which has seen enormous organic growth.

To me the Browne Jacobson culture is critical and it’s the main reason I am still at the firm more than 20 years after starting my training contract. The maintenance of our culture and ensuring that it is experienced by everyone is a key part of my role as Managing Partner. It’s so rewarding to be told by new people that they have genuinely found something different at Browne Jacobson.

Tell us about your experience of building client relationships at the firm. What advice do you give to future lawyers starting to work closely with clients?

The best part of my job as a corporate partner was getting to know the businesses we were selling or investing in. It taught me so much about the commercial world, the challenges faced day to day in the running of organisations and the realities of financing. It’s what made me so interested in our own business and has led to me sitting in the Managing Partner chair today.

Remember that clients are people too. Build relationships. Build relationships with people at your level. Those relationships may pay off down the line but even if they don’t, they are important for your development. And in building those relationships ask questions. Be interested in your clients and their organisations. In most cases, it will be genuinely fascinating and make you better at your job. It will also help you spot where you can add real value to your clients by making introductions or sharing lessons from your broader experience. That is something we think is a huge part of the value we can add to our client relationships.

There’s been much discussion in the legal press about a ‘war for talent’ in the legal sector. What is your view on how best to attract, develop and retain the next generation of lawyers?

We need to make sure we look in the right places to find the skills, personality, and talent we need. I couldn’t be prouder of our number one ranking in the Social Mobility Index. We have seen it change the lives of people who had never thought of working for a law firm or simply didn’t know how to do it. We’ve been more than rewarded for any investment we have made in that area.

It’s also critical that we give our people access to high quality work that makes a real difference to their clients. The best lawyers are those that solve their clients’ problems and form long-term relationships with them and have a detailed understanding of their priorities. Our partnership with O-shaped has been so helpful in reiterating that to our people and in designing learning and development activities to embed those rounded qualities that are better for the firm and our clients.

What are the greatest lessons you have learnt in your career at Browne Jacobson?

Be yourself. Clients don’t want their lawyers to be robots. Partners don’t want their teams and their colleagues to be automatons simply doing as they are told. They want real people with real experiences, and they are interested not just in your legal analysis, but in your opinion on what should be done. Communicate in a straightforward way and don’t be afraid of giving proper advice.

Integrity is so important. In my days as a trainee, I was working on a deal where the buyer changed their position on some key issues at the closing meeting. Despite the huge amount of work that had gone into the deal and the financial implications for us and other advisers, the partner I was working with told the client that, if it was their business, they would not do the deal. That was so impactful for me and was so valued by the client. That same partner made sure that our whole team knew the names of everyone in the business support teams and that they were shown the respect they deserved. It takes everyone employed in a law firm to make sure we can deliver for our clients.

What other advice do you give to 2022’s new future lawyers beginning their journey at Browne Jacobson?

Take the opportunities that are in front of you, and if they are not there seek them out. We’re a firm packed full of supportive ambitious people. Build networks within the firm. Wherever you end up focusing, those networks will play an enormous role in your future career, helping you develop business for yourself and the firm and to deliver the best service to your clients. I still get so much out of trusted relationships developed with colleagues during my training contract.

Never be afraid to ask questions. We are all always learning. I still ask others for their views all the time and have done throughout my career. We are stronger as a team.

Enjoy it. That is the main reason I am still at the firm after 22 years. I can't promise that every day will be easy or that you will always know the answer, but if like me you can find something you love doing, and people you genuinely like working with, it will make a real difference to how well you do it and the satisfaction you get from your job.

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