

Becoming O Shaped: Championing positive change

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Browne Jacobson was the first law firm to join the [O Shaped movement](#) in 2022, which aims to drive positive change across the legal sector. Two of our O Shaped Champions, Senior Associate Luke Deal and Associate Katherine Langley, spoke to us about their experience working with the initiative so far.

What is O Shaped?

Luke: O Shaped is about creating a culture change within the legal industry. It is about applying five mindsets – openness, originality, optimism, taking opportunities and taking ownership – in all you do to engage beyond the client instruction in front of you. As an example, this means considering how to best service the client's needs beyond that one issue. It's looking to introduce a new mindset to how we practice and trying to prevent having tunnel-vision.

Katherine: Exactly. It's all about having a rounded relationship with your clients. This goes beyond having soft skills or good client service – although this is part of it. It's about understanding their businesses, priorities, and concerns, and using this understanding to work together to get the best results for them. It's understanding what clients want not just in the piece of work, but in a wider context, whether their concerns are about money, publicity or time-spent, and working with them.

What motivated you to become O Shaped Champions?

Katherine: The ambition of wholesale cultural change within the industry really resonated with me and I found it very inspiring. During my time in the profession, I've seen lots of different ways of working that are all ultimately quite similar, so the different client contact focus here really appealed to me. At the time I was working across teams, but in particular with the education team, building relationships with their clients and with our own teams internally. I could really see the potential of the O Shaped approach to what I was doing, so I felt I had something valuable to offer as a champion based on the experiences I'd already had.

Luke: It was similar for me. I think there is a bit of an industry-wide complacency about the way we do things as lawyers, and I wanted to contribute to making the industry quicker to change. O Shaped is the most proactive initiative I've seen and I believe it has the potential to make a real difference. I think it's all our responsibility in the legal profession to examine and be critical of how we do things. For me, O Shaped is an opportunity to do things in a new way, to be part of something that we as a firm are at the forefront of, and to develop personally while helping to support cultural change.

What does being an O Shaped Champion involve and what has it been like so far?

Luke: It's still quite early days for both of us since we finished our training in December, but we've already had opportunities to get involved. Our main role is being ambassadors for the movement. We participate in the firm's roadshows, and workshops and panel talks, conveying the O Shaped message to the wider firm, helping colleagues understand what it means and start to put its messages into practice.

Katherine: It's definitely been a busy few months for both of us since finishing our training! As well as speaking on stage in front of the entire Nottingham office during our roadshow (which is something I won't forget in a hurry – it was exciting and nerve-wracking for me personally!), we've also presented to Richard Medd, our Managing Partner, on ways to embed and use O Shaped going forward and how we can integrate it into the firm's culture, which was a great opportunity. We've also worked to give the initiative more visibility across the firm, through things like contributing to our social media campaigns, such as the advent calendar and the new year's resolutions where each champion explained how we're being O Shaped in our approach.

Closer to home, my team has implemented a regular slot in our meetings where we talk about how people have been O Shaped that month and discuss examples to illustrate the concept and encourage everyone to keep doing it. This has actually been a real highlight of the experience for me so far – hearing those examples, seeing others recognise when it is happening and celebrating it.

Luke: I'd add that for me the training itself, particularly the workshops, have been a particular highlight so far. They were a unique opportunity to work with people from different areas of practice and different roles to find solutions to broad issues and how to embed O Shaped as a culture. We explored ways to make these things better and create more value for our clients as a result. The collision of ideas from all the people involved and having space to focus on some really important issues was really rewarding to be part of.

Katherine: I agree – it was unusual to have the mix of people that we did and we were able to speak safely and openly about the challenges we face. I thought it worked really well and it's so important to have honest conversations like these.

In your view, how does being O Shaped support Browne Jacobson's vision and strategy?

Luke: O Shaped and Browne Jacobson could not be more aligned. O Shaped reflects the firm's values of being down to earth, pragmatic and collaborative, so there's a massive strategic fit in how we want to be, behave and come across to our clients, and how the O Shaped initiative develops those behaviours.

Equally, we as a firm have really focused on embedding inclusion in our approach for a number of years now, and I think this focus on diversity has given us the mix of people that we need to be an O Shaped firm, rather than being too uniform, so I think there's a clear relationship between the two.

Katherine: I completely agree – they are absolutely consistent. Building on what Luke said - some of our inclusivity initiatives like FAIRE and the REACH mentoring scheme came up a lot in the discussions in the training workshops. I think this really showed that if we want to be original and open and O Shaped, we need to have that diverse and inclusive workplace, and our inclusion strategy can only help with this.

What would you say to someone who is considering taking part in the initiative?

Katherine: Go for it! I would encourage everyone who can take part in the training to do so. It is a big commitment, with compulsory sessions and homework, but it is one hundred percent worth it. Being a champion forces you to examine your own practices and assess your strengths and weaknesses and examine how you can develop both personally and in your relationships with clients and colleagues.

Luke: I would also encourage firms to embrace O Shaped from a business perspective. There's an incredibly strong business and economic case for doing this. The initiative was formed in collaboration with general counsel. These are effectively our clients telling us how they want us to be – we cannot ignore this message. On a more personal level, having the chance to influence the culture of your firm and help your colleagues be more well-rounded is an incredible opportunity which I would recommend to everyone.

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