

GOOD TO EXCELLENT

Project Description

Good to Excellent (GTE) is a change programme targeted at 650 support and secretarial staff in the London offices of Herbert Smith (HS). It aims to promote excellent service to our internal and external clients through behavioural and process changes at the individual, team and cross-support levels.

The programme started in July 2006 and has been divided into 4 key phases: securing buy-in and scoping the project; recognising the need to change and identifying areas for improvement; action planning in terms of individual behavioural changes, quick wins and longer term projects; and implementing these changes (see Appendix A).

Strategic Impetus

Client service is one of the key differentiators firms can leverage to gain competitive advantage. Our support staff have a direct and indirect role to play in the service levels our external clients' experience

It is business critical that fee earning staff have their time freed up to focus on client work and one of the key ways of achieving this is through support staff providing a proactive, tailored and client centred service.

Project Management – Design, Delivery

Phase 1

From the outset, the importance of buy-in across the firm was recognised. The Chief Operating Officer took on the role of project champion and launched the programme at our support conference. A dedicated project manager was appointed and a GTE project team led by the Head of HR was set-up with representatives from all the support areas.

An external consultancy, Mindtrip specialising in organisational and people development were selected to work closely with the in-house L&D and wider GTE project team.

Key communication milestones and channels were identified. A combination of "hard" and "soft" measures for the success of the programme were identified. These ranged from anecdotal evidence from focus groups and 1:1 interviews to a client service survey and an employee satisfaction survey that were sent to the whole firm. The surveys will be repeated in March 2008 to measure progress.

Phase 2

A series of departmental team-building workshops were held to encourage teams to identify what excellence means for them and how to achieve it. This was followed by a series of cross-departmental workshops where participants identified areas that other support areas could improve.

Phase 3

These workshops were department based and focussed on turning the outputs from the phase 2 workshops into individual and team action plans. The outputs varied from workshop to workshop depending on the needs of each department. For example, the administration department focussed predominantly on identifying and signing up to changes at an individual level and these commitments have been formalised into the performance review process. The finance department had identified the need to develop Service Level Agreements and improve communication as key priorities so worked on these whilst HR and Business Development were more concerned with projects that spanned the different functions within their departments.

Phase 4

Action plans continue to be taken forward and the process is being managed by the GTE project team member for each department. In order to support staff in implementing their plans a series of skills booster sessions are being run.

A further support conference and a summer party are scheduled for July 2007 to celebrate successes so far, ensure that key messages are repeated and that the momentum of the programme is maintained.

The GTE team will remain active to drive forward change in their departments, coordinate cross-support initiatives, share successes across support and ensure that there are no gaps or duplications in our project work.

The firm is also undergoing an “excellence” initiative across the fee earning practice areas and the outputs from this are integrated with GTE.

Investment

The project has engaged 650 support staff who, on average, will have attended 3.5 days of GTE events – a total of 2275 person days.

Additionally, the firm has dedicated a considerable people resource to GTE including a dedicated project manager, GTE project team time, Support Head time, L&D design and facilitation and partner involvement in addition to the financial costs of external consultants, venue, refreshments and material costs.

Key Challenges

The main challenges have been logistical, gaining buy-in from the partnership and maintaining momentum.

We had to ensure that the business was supported when events were running. This was achieved through strong team work, flexibility and communication. For example, understanding peak work periods for each department eg financial year end in accounts.

In order to ensure buy-in and maintain momentum Heads of Departments took an active role in each set of workshops. They delivered a common message throughout all workshops emphasizing the need for change and demonstrating their own commitment.

The project team played a key role throughout – from delivering the communication plan, coordinating workshop nominations and managing the action planning stage.

Key Outcomes

The outcomes from the programme vary enormously in terms of their impact and the investment required achieving them. The list below provides a flavour of some of these outcomes.

1. “Quick wins” – behavioural and process changes that can be implemented quickly and easily eg changes to room booking procedures, clarification of budget codes
2. Department based projects – changes to existing processes or introduction of new work practices eg revamping intranet sites, reviewing and improving the staff retention strategy
3. Cross department working – recognition of common goals and greater cooperation across support departments eg annual budgeting process focussing on key priorities across support rather than priorities for individual departments and opening of the Dubai office
4. Enhanced networks and communication across support - greater awareness of roles and responsibilities meaning that queries and support can be directed to the right people eg using the appropriate support resource on client pitches
5. Morale and motivation – creating a culture where success is celebrated eg the introduction of the client service awards
6. Commitment to change – staff are challenging managers regarding the way the firm operates and using GTE as a lever for making client service improvements eg changes to reporting formats

Appendix A – Good to Excellent – Programme Phasing

Key Events / Activities	Objectives	Participants
Phase 1 – Securing buy-in and scoping the programme (end July – Oct 2006)		
Conference – ½ day off-site	Launch the GTE programme Gain buy-in from staff Develop a vision of success for the future	All support and secretarial staff (650 staff)
Select external provider	Assess external suppliers against pre-determined criteria Select a supplier to work with in-house team Design an overall strategy for the programme	Project Manager + representatives from the Support Leadership team
Formation of GTE project team	To ensure buy-in across support To act as sounding board for design and delivery of programme To communicate within their departments To ensure outcomes from project are implemented at department level	Project Manager Support Leadership team member A representative from each of the support areas
Support Leadership Team – awayday	Define the hard and soft measures of success Outline communication strategy	Chief Operating Officer, Heads of Support, Partnership representatives
Phase 2 – Recognising the need to change and identifying areas for improvement (Nov 2006 – Mar 2007)		
Departmental team-building workshop – ½ - 1 day off-site	Identify what excellence means within the department Understand roles and responsibilities across the department Building relationships within department Use HBDI psychometric to understand thinking styles	All support and secretarial staff working within their own departments A Partner introduced each session to highlight their expectations of support staff 13 workshops of 12-60 participants per session

<p>Cross-departmental workshops – ½ day</p>	<p>Understand roles and responsibilities across Support Identify key networks across the firm Identify "requests" from other support areas and "offers"</p>	<p>All support and secretarial staff working across departments 13 workshops of 50 participants per session</p>
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Phase 3 – Action and project planning (Apr 2007)		
Departmental workshops – ½ day	Review and collate outputs from phase 2 Develop action plans for quick wins and longer term projects Allocate people to project teams to take forward	All support and secretarial staff working within their own departments 13 workshops of 12-60 participants per session
Phase 4 – Implementing changes (Apr 2007 onwards)		
Individual change Project Implementation	Individuals working on actions and commitments eg presenting clients with solutions rather than barriers Project teams working on project plans identified at phase 3	All support and secretarial staff for individual actions Project teams vary from department to department. For example in BD and HR all staff are assigned to a project, in other areas selected individuals are involved
Skills Booster sessions – 90mins to ½ day	Provide skills to support people in implementing their individual actions and project work Topics cover project management, communication, influencing, raising your profile, client relationships and dealing with conflict	All support and secretarial staff 22 workshops of 20 participants per session
Support conference and summer party – ½ day	Celebrate success from GTE so far Restate key GTE messages eg role support staff play in relation to external clients as well as internal clients Provide further networking opportunities across support and the firm	All support and secretarial staff to attend conference Whole firm to attend Summer party