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II. Moving in-house

1. Why? And is it for you?

The decision to move in-house – or seriously consider it – is, in itself, an important aspect of your personal development.

Therefore, it is helpful to ask some Why questions – Why move? and Why now? – and articulate the reasons. If you have spoken to friends, colleagues or a recruitment consultant you have no doubt started to do this. It will be helpful to capture your thoughts so that you can reflect on what you were thinking in the moment and see if your thinking changes over time. An incident or a particular couple of months that sparked your initial desire for a change may feel different further down the track.

A way to review your situation could be to ask the following:

- What is it that I enjoy and am good at in my current (private practice) role and what do I want to retain?
- What different types of work or work environment am I looking forward to?

The second question and your answers can get a bit theoretical and woolly. To make it much more practical, so that you can imagine it with all your senses, we suggest you walk through your perfect day in the

new role. That's not to pretend that life in your new role will be perfect; but you can begin to sort out what would be essential, what would be nice to have and what does not matter so much.

Really get into the detail:

- When do you wake up and get up? Earlier or later than now?
- Where do you wake up? Where you currently live or have you moved?
- What do you wear?
- Do you travel to work or are you based from home? How much of each?
- If you travel, how do you get there – walk, car, train, bus? How long does that take?
- When you get to work, what does it look like from the outside and when you get inside?
- Are you in your own office or open plan?
- Who do you see and talk to?
- How much time do you spend at your desk – most of the time or not much?
- What sort of messages and tasks greet you?
- Are you doing mostly law or mostly management?
- Is the legal subject matter similar to what you are used to or new?
- Is it fairly narrow in scope or widely varied?
- What would you like to do at lunchtime? Quiet sandwich at your desk? Meet with colleagues? Go to the gym?
- How much of your day is with other people in meetings or online and how much on your own?
- When do you leave work?
- When do you get home?
- At home, are you doing a little/some/a lot of work?
- How are your weekends? Impacted by work or not?
- In your non-work time and holidays are you able to spend more or less time on family and personal interests?
- How will you feel at the end of the day compared with now – tired or energised?
- How will you sleep?

We appreciate that is quite a list, but which elements strike you as interesting and important? What was already on your hit list of wishes, and what might be a new consideration?

2. What makes working in-house different?

Another simple question? Perhaps, but worth delving into at the stage of deciding whether to go in-house and also as you look to progress in your in-house career.

At the most fundamental level, the biggest difference is that the purpose of the business or organisation you are joining is not to give legal advice and to be paid for doing so. We will all have been brought up to regard the law as important and difficult. It will have taken a lot of skill and hard work to qualify and make progress in a legal career. Many law firms and law firm partners rightly have powerful reputations. And the legal function in your organisation is probably (note probably) held in high regard – possibly even fear and reverence! But it will be a support function – not the core business. It almost goes without saying that you need to be clear-eyed and happy about that.

The big plus is that you can potentially create or lead a legal function that does more and does it more imaginatively and effectively than had previously been the case or been imagined. You can be someone who transforms legal from the ‘business prevention department’ to the ‘business growth department’, where your people are seen as among the brightest and best in the organisation, with whom others enjoy working.

Make a point throughout your career of seeking out and talking to successful in-house lawyers who can act as mentors – listening to you as you discuss your successes and challenges and, when appropriate,

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offering advice. The question of what makes working in-house different could be a major element of your discussions. Or you could also go down the path of working with a business coach, not an in-house lawyer, who can offer a fresh perspective. With a coach the emphasis will be on you explaining how things are and how you might want to do things differently.

3. No longer a one-way street

It may seem strange to consider this if you are now just at the stage of considering going in-house, (and not so strange if you are already there), but there can be a route back from in-house to private practice. You may well be plotting your career journey one or two moves ahead and already thinking about the experience and skills you could gain in an in-house role that would benefit you, and equip you to make a significant contribution back in a law firm. That could cover either or both legal skills and management experience.

Your business sector experience could be of great value to a firm wanting to expand in that sector, in which case immersing yourself in the business issues of that sector and not just the legal issues will be vital. In some law firms they will be looking to import valuable insights and practices from the business world – a more commercial culture, better organisation, greater creativity and innovation, more accountability, better development of talented people. If it makes sense, you could look to update your CV every six months to see what experience you have gained and results you have achieved that would impress a law firm.

This chapter 'Moving in-house' by Ian White and Simon McCall is from the Special Report 'Managing and Developing Your Career as an In-house Lawyer', published by Globe Law and Business.