

Return to the office: Why this disputes boutique has stuck to five days a week

By Annabel Tinson | 14 March 2024

As law firm leaders continue to debate how often they should require their staff to work in the office, one litigation boutique has told *The Lawyer* why they still ask junior staff to come in five days a week.

For the past two years, litigation boutique CANDEY has asked the more junior members of its ranks to come to the office full-time.

Speaking with *The Lawyer*, the boutique's managing partner, Ashkhan Candey, said: "It's really important for those at the start of their profession. We have a duty to train them.

"I don't tell the partners what to do, I let the partners make up their own minds. While there are exceptions, the majority are in most of the time. I'm in four days a week, for example."

He continued: "The pandemic gave people a false sense of security. They didn't need to have buildings or come together, and they could cut their rent. But really they're destroying their businesses as it's about building up brand, culture, and loyalty."

Last August, *The Lawyer* reported that several firms were starting to drop the hybrid working model. This included Newcastle firm Winn Solicitors, whose CEO said the move had been a "major

success" and contributed to the wider Winn Group's record financial year.

Candey added: "The main reason we come in is because we enjoy coming in. In those organisations where people don't want to come into the office, is it because they don't like their colleagues or culture? How can they contribute to the firm's culture if they're not there?"

He said: "People take longer to do things when they're at home, that's why people instruct firms of lawyers, not individual practitioners."

The firm has 14 partners, eight barristers, four US attorneys, eight solicitors and seven paralegals. The disputes boutique did clarify that it still promotes flexibility: "Where people have young children or are carers we do promote flexibility. We are not blind to the challenges of life."

"Ultimately we are a people business, and our culture is fundamental to our success. Many lawyers sadly dislike the law and feel trapped by it. They don't enjoy going to the office. Our aim is to create an environment whereby our staff genuinely want to come into the office instead of being at home."

Ever since pandemic restrictions lifted, firms across the UK have either kept or increased their office attendance policies.

Several US firms in the City have upped attendance to four days a week for example, as colleagues across the Atlantic struggle even more to entice back staff to cities like New York and San Francisco.

Meanwhile others including Eversheds Sutherland, Clifford Chance and Travers Smith have kept their policies at three days a week.