



Well-being at work: an interview with Keith Froud

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We are all aware that pressures of work can be challenging within professional services firms, and that securing a better work/life balance is being increasingly recognised as contributing to enhanced business performance, but how achievable is it in practice? We invited Keith Froud, International Managing Partner and Executive Wellbeing Sponsor at Eversheds Sutherland to share his experiences and talk a little about some of the great initiatives Eversheds Sutherland have put in place to support this important issue:




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Keith Froud

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1. Why is wellbeing important to Eversheds Sutherland?

Quite apart from the increasing focus in society at large, we recognise that lawyers can be susceptible to challenges around wellbeing - both physical and mental health challenges. Lawyers are trained to analyse things critically and support their clients without fail but they may not always step back and reflect upon whether the pace and focus is having a negative impact on them personally or indeed their productivity. At Eversheds Sutherland we are committed to attracting and retaining the best talent and to sustain that we know that we need to support our people in this critical area. Our focus on wellbeing is entirely aligned with our People strategy and our Purpose and Values as a firm. We believe that now is the time for this. It is an area that is very close to people and very relevant to their daily lives. To be clear, this is not about not working hard. Our people want to work in a high performing environment. But we need to have a culture of sustainable high performance. Wellbeing is vital to achieving this.



2. Could you explain the firm's history when it comes to a focus on wellbeing - how did you get to where you are now?

The firm has a long history of initiatives related to wellbeing, but we felt there was an opportunity to coordinate this more and also focus on key areas more consistently. In May 2018, coinciding with Mental Health Awareness week, we launched our new Wellbeing strategy, pulling together the separate strands of existing activity and enhancing some of our offerings. For example, we have had an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for many years, but we wanted to bring this up to gold standard for our people, so we invested in an enhanced scheme which was, for example, also accessible to family members. We looked across all of our programmes to identify what was working and where we could do things better.

3. What level of visibility within Eversheds Sutherland does Wellbeing have? What role do you play?

I am proud to be our Executive Wellbeing Sponsor and passionate to progress things in this area. It has universal application. Everyone can benefit, not just those who may be vulnerable. Wellbeing is very visible within the firm. It is on the agenda of leadership meetings at all levels. I chair our Wellbeing Steering Committee which sets the high level strategy across the firm, focusing on different aspects throughout the year. But we also believe that local initiatives are vital and our Senior Office Partners have embraced the approach. Our senior leaders get directly involved in our wellbeing initiatives.

We understand that our commitment needs to be not only words but personal actions.

We share our stories. Best practice is communicated regularly and we learn from each other across offices and geographies. We have a global strategy but understand that there will be different nuances and approaches around the world, and individual offices are encouraged to pursue initiatives which work for them. The blending of the global strategy with local initiatives has been exciting. Being a part of this has been incredibly rewarding. Some of the feedback which I have received has been truly inspiring.

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4. How has the work of the Committee been received by your people? Is there a way that you measure this?

I think that it has been really well received. Whether in terms of the direct support which people know they can access, the ability for everyone to have ideas and get involved, or just the fact that they know they are part of an organisation which cares about its people.

We track the level of participation in each initiative. When we looked at the importance of sleep for example, this attracted a record number of hits on our intranet site.


As part of our wider people strategy we promote continuous feedback and development, including quarterly check-ins for all of our people, and wellbeing questions are part of that. We monitor the causes and levels of absence through illness, which helps us to understand the impact of our efforts and the areas to focus on. We obtain feedback via internal surveys. We also have 360 feedback which allows us to look at how our partners and line managers are living our values - for example, we look carefully at supervision to ensure people are getting proper support.

5. Would you share some examples of recent initiatives?

Some examples include the re-launched EAP that I mentioned earlier and which has received very positive feedback. We have signed the Time to Change Pledge - a commitment to changing the way we all think and act about mental health in the workplace. We have provided Mental Health Awareness Training across the business. We have a Tech-Life balance initiative where teams look at how they can use technology to work for them, not against them. There is a big focus on physical health - lots of initiatives around exercise and also looking at areas such as nutrition and healthy eating. We also discuss wellbeing with our clients. Part of this is sharing ideas and best practice. Clients also want to work with organisations which take the wellbeing of their people seriously and are responsible employers. Plus, clients are increasingly keen to work with us and have regard to the wellbeing of teams on both sides. Eversheds Sutherland was one of the original signatories to the Mindful Business Charter. This is a charter developed by a number of banks and their external law firms. At its core, the Charter is about minimising unnecessary stress in the working environment. Its principles include improved communication, respect for rest periods and the considerate delegation and allocation of tasks. Outside of the Charter we are discussing similar principles with clients across other industry sectors.



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6. From your experience, what are the critical enablers to making these initiatives a success?

You need to be adaptable to cultures and ideas. Many of the ideas which form part of the global strategy have come from insights shared with the Steering Committee by Senior Office Partners from the activities in their offices. We have found that it helps to share personal experiences - this is powerful. I have talked to groups about my own experience balancing work and home life and changes I have made over the years which have helped me. This has, in turn, led to others sharing their tips and experiences. You need to lead by example - at all levels. Our Senior Office Partners have been critical to the success of the strategy - they are tremendous champions. Bringing in outside experts provides further validation, although their input needs to be tailored to our business and people. We work hard with our external advisors to help them to understand our business and incorporate that within their programmes for us. Lastly, I would say that keeping things fresh is very important - always looking at new ideas and trying to be ahead of the curve.

7. What positive impacts can you draw upon to illustrate how beneficial this has been to Eversheds Sutherland?

We receive a lot of positive feedback from our people which we can circulate, if appropriate on an anonymous basis. The conversations with clients about wellbeing also grab the attention of our people and help to inform our approach. Our Tech-Life balance initiative is helping our people to operate more effectively. The tips and experiences to support sustainable high performance always provoke real interest and people make changes as a result.

8. What are you most proud of in regard to this work?

The level of engagement we have seen from everyone is very exciting. For me personally, it is a fantastic opportunity to be part of something which is so inclusive, applies across the whole of our business internationally and ultimately makes such a positive contribution. It is really, really motivating.

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