

# REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP

Here, **Lisa Burton**, GLL Ambassador and Chief Executive Officer of Legal Data Workspace, reflects on leadership lessons learnt and shares her advice on creating your own career path based on your passions.



## Global Leaders in Law: Looking back on your career, what has been the most useful piece of advice you have received?

**Lisa Burton:** To be myself, to trust in my own judgment and to be brave enough to challenge when you know in your heart that you it is the right thing to do, even if scary i.e. when you think your peers/clients are going to look at you with a worried expression of wonder! I can honestly say, that in a polite, reasoned challenge, I have achieved more for my team, clients and business partners whilst broadening my own learning. With ESG and CSR high on the agenda, personal integrity is highlighted when 'playing the game' in business. I believe both are achievable and I have been extremely fortunate to work with some stellar men and women who have helped shape and guide me

into the successful businesswoman I am today.

## GLL: You have had several different careers, what advice would you offer to leaders that are looking to change career paths?

**Lisa:** During my career, although predominantly, an expert data and legal technologist, I have flirted with, and indeed set up two successful food businesses. Over the years I had these businesses, it took me some while before I realised, I am a serial businesswoman and entrepreneur. That was a big realisation as I had made very good friends with The Imposter syndrome and although felt I was bursting with a lot of knowledge, skill and ability to help my clients in both of my passions, legal data/tech and healthy, great food. I often stayed quiet when I could have and should

have spoken up. So the first thing I would say, is understand your own patterns around thinking and stuff you have a passion for in your work, because in recurring themes (and pushing aside the imposter syndrome - something that we know effects women more than men), you may realise a new skill set or a strength that you did not really appreciate you had. The positive power of professional and personal relationships in networking is also never to be underestimated. Networking is a tool that I have found has helped propel me to where I want to go. That said, I think we have to be passionate about what we are doing and there has to be a purpose. Afterall, most people tend to think of the term 'vocation' to mean what you do to earn money but the true meaning of the word actually runs much deeper than that... 'Vocare' is a latin word, meaning to call, name

or invoke. That means that when you're doing your true vocation, you're doing so as a response to a calling you have within you. **A vocation increases your sense of aliveness, creativity and energy as you do it and the work you're doing is visible and felt by colleagues, customers and everyone you engage with.** If you love what you are doing, engagement in networks as part of my professional development journey has helped me to expand and grow and evolve my career. That said, I have worked in environments where I have been miserable because for example, written policies on diversity and inclusion are not 'lived' operationally (i.e. where I have experienced sexism and passive aggressive bullying first-hand). Having the courage to move on when I have been unhappy, although scary, has ultimately meant that the growth I have experienced has been rewarding which eventually far outweighs the fear.

## GLL: How do you ensure you foster a creative mindset?

**Lisa:** It may be a cliché or considered a bit 'woowoo', but I would say, be a brave thinker. You may have ideas and want to go down an entirely different path, but that path feels full of unknowns and uncertainty, and I know many folks who have stayed in the same role as a 'safety' valve of a well-trodden albeit, unfulfilling role that provides certainty. But without change, we don't grow, we stagnate. Life's about change...It's how we face it that's a choice. Whether we strive for it or try to avoid it, change WILL happen. Creativity in any role is our

licence to be who we really are. To foster creativity on an individual level, get away from your desk and expose yourself to new situations and experiences. Giving your brain more inputs is scientifically proven to encourage new mental connections and spark new ideas. Listen to a podcast, have creative conversations; you never know where inspiration might come from.

## GLL: How have you navigated a successful relationship with fellow board members? What advice would you offer GCs that are looking to grow their influence?

**Lisa:** I think what I call 'wise honesty' staying true to and constantly examining my values, integrity and principles is a good start with a view to leaning into and understanding more about the individuals on my Board in context of the depth and breadth of the business. Greater than that though is the ability to listen. To give space to fellow board members. Obviously, there are always some colleagues that have more of a commonality, a resonance and those that do not. Raising challenges and concerns can be tricky, but I find if I write out the issues or concerns first and think about it before I take action, it can help steer what maybe a difficult conversation into a positive outcome for the individuals concerned. I have learned a lot about how to effectively challenge a situation and it is never easy! It is easy to say, that just being who we are as unique individuals is enough to successful Board relationships – be ourselves, be confident in our abilities. **Creativity and thinking outside the box whilst staying**

**within the main boundaries of the business,** for example, identifying how to improve inefficiencies across inter-active teams, needs some thought as to approach but baby steps can often achieve greater influence than trying to compete or jostle to be heard. As individual board members, we each have so much richness to bring and with a great degree of compassion and respect for good and bad days that we all experience, **I sincerely believe that individual empowerment creates strength in business leadership as a team.**