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**TALENT SQUEEZE CASE STUDY:**

# Cornwalls

Find out how one of Melbourne's oldest law firms embraced innovation to inspire and empower the talent at the heart of its success.

# How variety and autonomy can captivate top talent

In a hotly competitive market, a rebranded law firm is taking a range of unique approaches to keeping its people engaged, empowered and always bringing on the new.

In 2019, one of Melbourne's oldest law firms, Cornwall Stodart, unveiled a new brand and a new structure aimed at fostering innovation and delivering multidisciplinary services. Rebranded Cornwalls Law + More, the firm's transformation values agility over hierarchy and puts talent at the centre of its success.

Cornwalls is led by CEO Levent Shevki, who has been with the firm for 22 years. "I did my articles here and so did our chairman [John Hutchings], who has been with the firm for 44 years," Shevki says.

"This is a testament to the strong culture that was already in place at Cornwalls. The firm empowered me from day one to be entrepreneurial and gave me the autonomy to try new things, and that sense of empowerment underpins much of our strategy today."

## Vision for the future

Shevki was appointed CEO of the 131-year-old firm 2018. His vision for Cornwalls is supported by five strategic pillars: talent and culture, client and brand, finance and risk, technology and innovation, and operational excellence.

"When I became CEO, I did a lot of reading on what makes a firm successful, and it comes down to talent and culture," he says. "This is what feeds into all the other pillars of our firm. When you have the right talent and culture, your clients will get great service, your people will work smarter, and the organisation will look for new ways to innovate."

Shevki restructured the firm to create "more teams with more leaders to empower more people".

"Our employees are empowered to go outside the box to come up with innovative solutions," he says. "Each team manages their own business plan and P&L, which promotes innovation. So, if they have \$30,000 for marketing, for instance, they can spend it however they want to meet their objectives. Embedding innovation into our culture requires trusting people and giving everyone the opportunity to initiate change."

While Cornwalls' employees have an option to work remotely, its new office in Melbourne's CBD is designed to foster teamwork and creativity.

The office includes a café, a dedicated wellness room and an innovation lab fitted with Cruiser Interactive technology, which features interactive screens to support collaboration.

"Our innovation lab can also be used by clients and start-ups," says Shevki. "This is not your average law firm office."

## Multidisciplinary talent

The Cornwalls rebrand also included the integration of three businesses – two established law firms in Sydney and Brisbane, as well as a boutique business advisory firm, which is now branded Cornwalls Capital.

Cornwalls employs approximately 180 people across a range of specialities in law and corporate advisory, and has recently launched a venture capital fund, F5 Collective, which is focused on investing in female founders.

Shevki says expanding the firm's offering serves two key purposes. ▶



## LEVENT SHEVKI'S TIPS FOR EMPOWERING TALENT:

### 1 ENCOURAGE ENTREPRENEURIALISM

"Share your purpose and give people an understanding of what they need to achieve, but how they get there should be up to them. That's when you start to notice the lateral thinkers."

### 2 HIRE THE BEST AND GIVE THEM YOUR TRUST

"If you micromanage, people will become insular – they'll think that you don't trust them, and then they will lose trust in you."

### 3 SHOW EMPATHY

"People expect leaders to be human. If your lawyers are working long hours and burning out, listen to them and foster their wellbeing."

“The legal industry is changing fast, so we need to be ahead of that change and be multidisciplinary to ensure we can offer our clients a range of services,” he says.

“But being multidisciplinary also helps us to attract and retain the best talent. For our new venture capital fund, for example, we’ve given two of our female lawyers the opportunity to drive it from a legal perspective and to be ambassadors for it in the market, which helps them to promote their own expertise within their network. We launched the fund three months ago and we’ve already invested in three female founders.”

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LEVENT SHEVKI, CEO,  
CORNWALLS LAW + MORE

Paul Goessler, National Head of Professional Services, Westpac Commercial Bank, describes Cornwalls as “a multidisciplinary business anchored by law”.

“Cornwalls has created an ecosystem where lawyers can experience a variety of interesting work throughout different

divisions, but law remains at the very centre,” he says. “The firm is agile enough to have pivoted in different directions and we’ve been very interested in working with them to support their growth profile.”

Shevki describes Westpac as “extremely responsive”. “They’ve been supportive of our innovative approach,” he says. “We’ve never felt hindered by them, only supported.”

### Opportunity for more

Shevki says Cornwalls plans to launch more venture capital funds, with the next one focused on Web3.

“Again, we’ll give this to some of our lawyers to run from a legal perspective,” he says. “If you want to stand out as an employer of choice, you have to do much more than just say, ‘We’re a great firm and we’ll pay you really well!’.

“People want more than just money, and we’re seeing this first-hand,” adds Shevki. “It’s such a competitive market right now and young talent across the industry are being poached by larger firms through pay packets that we just haven’t seen before. But I’m pleased to say that two of our staff who left the business have recently come back.

“Yes, salary needs to be appropriate, but we know that people want variety, they want a sense of autonomy, they want to feel empowered, and that’s what we give them.



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WAYS TO WIN OVER  
TALENT IN OUR NEW  
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