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How two job-sharing lawyers launched their own firm

BY ANGELA PRIESTLEY / JUN 24, 2013 10:38AM / (0)



The job-sharing arrangement between Jane Wright and Lauren Barel was going so well at Herbert Smith Freehills that the two thought they could take it all the way to the partnership.

Working in the employment group at the firm the pair job shared for five years, sharing a senior associate position and receiving excellent client feedback while undertaking both advice and litigious matters.

But when their plans to become the first job-sharing partner came undone (due to family commitments and existing internal policies at the firm) they did the next best thing: opened a new business, sharing the running of the firm in much the same way as they'd operated at Freehills. With five children under the age of six between them, it's providing a means for both Wright and Barel to progress their careers while raising young families.

Launched two months ago, [Workdynamic Australia](#) specialises in workplace investigations, employment and advisory work. They took one key client across with them which continued to support their job-sharing arrangement, and have recently brought a third partner into the business, former Minter Ellison senior associate Jonathan Wright.

Barel first approached Jane Wright about job sharing at Freehills when the two were pregnant around the same time with their first child. "We found people who work part-time don't really get the good work, job sharing was a way to get that good work," says Wright.

Barel, who had previously worked part-time, says there is no comparison between job sharing and working part-time when it comes to career benefits and being able to take on quality work. "Job sharing means that my days off are truly days off, as I know that Jane is handling things in her usual capable way."

Job sharing also provides a level of collaboration that's extremely productive and adds a new level of quality to their work. Wright believes they can put in more than 100% of what a full-time person could offer, and says clients often note that they're getting "two heads for the price of one".

The pair have structured the arrangement by each working a different part of the week and sharing one crossover day. While they have an office in the city, running their own firm also means they can work-from-home when needed.

Barel says the relationship has been successful because they were the right fit for each other. "Jane and I were fortunate in this sense, as we were at the same level of seniority, had the same level of ambition and were interested in the same speciality of employment law," she says. "Our skills complement each other and we have developed a level of trust and respect for each other." It helps that their children are also around the same age.

Wright says it's essential to find somebody you can trust to make a job-sharing arrangement work. "Find someone around your level with a similar work ethic who's perceived the same way by external people," she says. You don't have to be similar personality types or friends – indeed Wright notes that she's very different to Barel. The pair were also not particularly close starting out as Summer clerks at Freehills back in 1999.

But so deep is the trust Wright and Barel have for each other that Wright says they couldn't have imagined competing against one another for a limited number of partner promotions.

Retaining such a level of respect is not easy and takes continued work. "But it is worth it as we have each been able to pursue successful careers while having young children," says Barel.



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