

My flexibility story

I have experienced first-hand how taking a collaborative and personalised approach to integrating work-life balance through flexible working arrangements can benefit both the individual worker's career, and the success of the business.

I am the practice leader of the commercial and property team at Clifford Gouldson Lawyers in Toowoomba. I moved to Toowoomba about four years ago after deciding that I wanted to move closer to my family. I was coming from a sizeable firm in Brisbane and had developed a strong practice in property law, particularly rural property.

After changes within the firm I initially came to Toowoomba to work for, I was contacted by Clifford Gouldson, a firm I knew to be held in high regard in the Toowoomba region. The firm did not practise in my area of specialty, but after some discussion we decided that I would join the firm and develop a commercial law practice.

Fast forward two years and I was expecting my first child. With imminent life changes ahead, I took some time to reflect. In particular:

- I had invested significant time and effort into developing my expertise in commercial practice and building a strong team.
- I had fostered many strong personal relationships with my clients and the business community.
- I felt that taking 12 months' maternity leave would significantly affect my team and my practice.
- I decided that I wanted to keep my career moving.
- Despite all the above, it was important to me to be a significant part of my child's life.



The result of this reflection was a plan to return to work after three months' maternity leave. I discussed this plan with the directors before I went on leave. They were fully supportive of my plan, but also encouraged me to take the time I needed. They suggested that we touch base closer to my planned return date to discuss what I would need to facilitate my transition back to work.

In the end, I did return after three months. Together, we came up with a flexible arrangement whereby I aim to work from home one day each week, and the firm also turned one of our client meeting rooms into a feeding room. Having a private and comfortable feeding room meant that my husband (who was at home caring for our daughter) was able to bring my daughter in during the day for a feed, and I could also comfortably express as needed.

I really felt like I did not need to push for a flexible arrangement at my firm. There always seemed to be acceptance that making personalised work-life arrangements was part of the reality of attracting and retaining great staff in a regional environment. The directors were very proactive in simply asking me what I would need to make things work.

I think my flexible arrangement works well because I have the full and genuine support of the directors and my colleagues. No one has ever made me feel like my arrangements make their life difficult. There are, of course, logistical challenges from time to time – when IT issues rear their ugly head, or urgent meetings arise – but the close distance from home to work generally makes these easy to circumvent.

A collaborative approach to managing a sustainable return to work benefits all involved and is a great strategy to improve retention of top staff.

Amanda Tolson offers her flexibility story.



It was also challenging for me to transition into a new arrangement – I love the hum and buzz of the office, and at first I found it difficult to keep myself motivated without that environment to keep me going at home. However, once I got myself organised, I managed to structure my workload so that I kept certain types of work to be done in the relative quiet of my home office that would be more challenging in our open-plan office environment.

From the outset of my time with the firm, it was obvious to me that the directors were open and accepting of personalised arrangements. There were numerous examples of good work-life balance, including in the directors themselves, and there were already some staff working remotely on a permanent basis. I think that this collaborative environment really allowed

me to sink my teeth into the challenge ahead without worrying about whether all my hard work would be thrown away when a child came into the mix. It made sure that I never had one foot on the accelerator and one on the brake at the same time. Instead, I gave the firm everything I had, knowing that when the time came, they would help me to keep helping them.

Very recently the success of this approach has been reinforced with the existing two directors, Danny Clifford and Ben Gouldson, inviting me to join them as a director. This more than anything shows that, with a flexible approach and the right attitude of everyone involved, it is possible for a female lawyer to continue to progress her career while also enjoying a healthy and happy family life.

My experience has made me see how this collaborative approach to flexibility really helps to retain top talent, particularly in regional areas where it can sometimes be difficult to attract staff. But not only that – it also makes the junior members of the profession more optimistic about what lies ahead for them in their own careers.

This story was prepared on behalf of the Queensland Law Society Equalising Opportunity in the Law Committee for the flexibility working group. The group needs your story – good or bad. Please contact flexibility@qls.com.au and share your experiences with flexibility in the legal profession.

Lean on us – a Benevolent Fund **for you**



Providing financial support when it's needed...

Law Foundation-Queensland Solicitors Benevolent Fund provides monetary assistance to Queensland Law Society members, their families and dependents in times of financial difficulty.

Assistance is provided:

- on a strictly confidential basis
- through a modest, but unsecured and interest free, short term loan
- to applicants approved by the Foundation.

Financial difficulty could arise from a range of circumstances, not necessarily from a practice-related issue, for example serious illness or an accident.

Applications can be made at any time.

Contact the Secretary, Queensland Law Foundation, for application details.

Phone 07 3236 1249 / 0400 533 396
law.foundation@qlf.com.au



Law Foundation Queensland