

## CAREER PROFILE

James Wilson was the Global Senior Partner of International Law firm, Ince & Co LLP, from March 2008 until January 2015, combining the functions often divided between 'Senior Partner' and 'Managing Partner' in other firms.

With 90 partners and a total complement of over 600, Ince & Co has a reputation as one of the leading international law firms specialising in Shipping, Energy & Offshore, International Trade and Insurance. The firm comprises 11 offices across Europe, the Middle East, South East Asia and China

Over the period 2009-2012, James oversaw a major project to introduce an entirely new management, remuneration and governance structure in the firm. This involved designing and implementing a process to engage the partnership in understanding and agreeing the need for change. A working group, representing different elements of the partnership, was chaired by James to develop proposals for the required changes. A successful consultation across the international partnership resulted in the changes being adopted in principle in March 2012.

The changes to structure, remuneration and governance were implemented alongside a complete revision of the firm's risk structure through the adoption of a network of Limited Liability Partnerships, which required a separate project, overseen by James, to achieve consensus to the terms of an entirely new set of deeds (all 90 partners becoming signatories).

The longevity of the downturn in the clients' market in the firm's primary sector, Shipping, started to feed through into a downturn in the demand for legal services in 2013. That resulted in the need for James to lead a management initiative to restructure the firm's resources to meet the change in strategic outlook.

Having completed the Meyler Campbell Business Coaching Programme, James now offers coaching support to senior business leaders, often in the professional services sector. By combining his personal experience of leading an international service firm with the rigour of his Meyler Campbell training, James brings genuine empathy for the leadership challenges faced by his clients.

## JAMES' APPROACH TO COACHING

The role of a coach is not to tell clients what they should be doing. It is a relationship of equals, between a business leader and a confidential, objective and trusted adviser. The higher one rises in any organisation the more difficult it becomes to initiate a conversation just to test an idea, to express doubt or uncertainty, or to find someone who will give non-judgemental and independent feedback. Having a coach makes it a lot less



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'lonely at the top'. The organisation also benefits from more effective, energised and focused leadership.

I often say that my PA was the best advocate for the benefits that coaching can bring to anyone in a leadership role.

"Have you been to one of those sessions with your coach on the way into work this morning?" asked Debbie, my PA, while I was Senior Partner. "Why?", I replied. "Because", she said, "you are very energised and very focused - and that's very tiring for the rest of us!"

That conversation stayed with me. It was part of a two-pronged thought process that led me down the path of becoming an Executive Coach. The truth was that I had indeed had a great session with my coach that morning and I was really energised and focused - and confident and clear about what I needed to do next. It led me to think how wonderful it would be to have a job that involved generating some of that energy and confidence for others.

The second part of my thinking happened during a sabbatical break after stepping down as Senior Partner. I was sitting on a beach with my wife, watching the sun set in Vietnam, discussing what I should do next. With the startling clarity that comes with a beautiful sunset, a chilled gin and tonic and a very perceptive wife, I made a decision that my goal should be to do only the things that I enjoyed and to cut away the rest of the 'stuff' that drains away energy and causes tedium.

And when I looked back at 7 years of being the Senior Partner of an international law firm, the 'good days at the office' almost always involved a quiet conversation with an individual or small group that seemed to make a difference. It was that thought that reinforced my enthusiasm to pursue a career as an Executive Coach.

And so I applied for and was accepted onto the Meyler Campbell Business Coaching Programme. My experience of completing the BCP over the next 12 months confirmed what my initial research suggested, namely, that it is simply the best course of its type in the UK.

The Programme was the first course in Europe to be accredited by the Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC) and it was awarded the European Quality Award by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council in 2012.

There is a depth and breadth to the programme and its tutorial structure that is so challenging and so rewarding - and the opportunity to gain so much hands on practical experience of coaching throughout the programme was really valuable.

And so now I have the privilege (and it is a privilege) to support other senior leaders in partnership environments as they grapple with many similar issues to the ones that I had to deal with. My goal is simple - to help them embrace their challenges with energy and focus in the same way as my coach helped me.



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