

Case Study

LawNet

Business Skills 101 Programme

The LawNet Business Skills 101 Programme, designed and delivered by Nicola Jones at Athena Professional, has won a national prize for Learning Excellence from the Association for Business Psychology.

Background

Athena Professional is a multiple award-winning Continuous Learning Consultancy specialising in blended learning. Led by Nicola Jones, a former barrister with more than 20 years' experience in learning design and facilitation, Athena Professional creates learning interventions using a range of resources, including interactive-learning, virtual and in-person workshops and coaching, to provide learners with the capability, knowledge and motivation to put learning into practice.

Our client, LawNet, provides services, including continuous learning, to a community of over 70 SME law firms throughout the UK. A total of 36 lawyers 0 – 5 years PQE from 12 firms completed the Business Skills 101 Programme in two cohorts during the pandemic crisis 2020/21.



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Through focus-group discussion with member law firms and LawNet, reference to the Solicitors Regulatory Authorities' Competency Framework and our own expertise in the sector, a shared view of future skills emerged. It was agreed that, in addition to transactional commercial skills, using psychological tools would promote a growth mindset and open up thinking about transformational client services of the future.

The programme ran through lockdown, with most participants living with parents or in shared houses. Some had joined their firms after the pandemic struck and all were coping with the transition to remote-working at a time when they much to learn in any event.

Solution

We wove together **educational and behavioural psychology** with cutting-edge learning methodologies, including **personalisation** and **blended learning** over a five month programme.

Formal learning focused on key elements of legal practice which were then deployed in **work-based learning** and reinforced with **social learning** to minimise contact time and maximise impact.

Project work brought together all these elements to produce proposals of real business value.

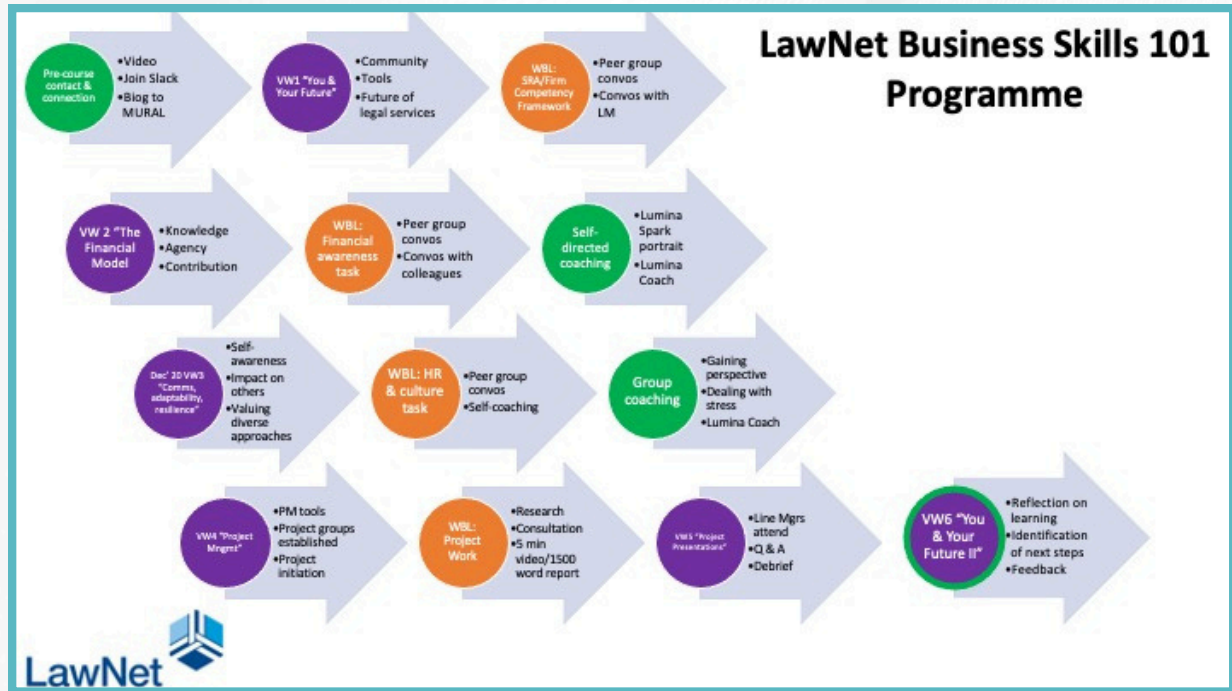


Objective

Human skills will be at the heart of the delivery of legal services in the future. However, newbie lawyers still have to be effective in today's world. Our challenge was to introduce them to "business skills" which make sense now, and to set them up to understand and changing legal landscape.

Lawyers have a complex relationship with time; it is both a unit of value and a constraint on attitudes and behaviour. Newly qualifieds are high achievers, expected to make money quickly and not cost much. We had a modest budget of time, attention and money, with which to deliver outcomes.

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How it worked

Rather than focussing purely on content, we aimed to engage as deeply as possible with our learners as individual practitioners, to inspire them and to help them gain learning habits which will serve them in the world of work.

For these reasons, the programme design was informed by the six factors of **Rhyff's Model of Psychological Well-being**, specifically through our facilitative approach to teaching, coaching methodologies including reflective practice, and by integrating the opportunity to gain evidence of success of environmental mastery through project work.

We created a community of practice through:

- The co-creation of "ways of working" to contract for a safe learning environment.**
- Facilitating social learning through an online platform.**
- Group coaching.**
- Promoting communication and connection in breakout groups during virtual workshops, peer group work, and project group work.**

Measurement was planned to be via a pre- and post-course self-assessment and line manager assessment.

However, although we did this at the outset, the pressures created by the pandemic and the tendency for perfectionism amongst typically high-achievers, made this feel too onerous to repeat.

Instead, we collected feedback anonymously via an app, and through discussion with participants, their line managers and LawNet.

Individuals were clear that they valued the connections they made and the time they spent together in session and in small group project work. EQ work was felt to be especially valuable. In discussion, it was noted that professional relationships between firms had already led to referral work between member LawNet firms.

LawNet received positive feedback from members about the programme, which was immediately commissioned to run twice in the following year. They were delighted, because the Great Resignation is affecting SME law firms significantly and this programme adds real business value to LawNet members by providing immediate development opportunities and demonstrating engagement with practical future-facing skills.

Client feedback

"The proof is in the pudding. Apart from being very impressed with the end of course presentations made by our students (and I have to say, by students from other LawNet firms), I have seen a significant improvement in the participants' commercial awareness, adaptability and organisational skills. In addition, the group of lawyers concerned are demonstrating a clear understanding of the challenges that the firm and the lawyers themselves face in the near and medium term, particularly in relation to adapting to the delivery digital legal services."



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Human skills for a digital age