

Most Inspiring Mental Wellbeing Lead

Winner

Russ Martin, Ashurst



This category recognises an inspirational mental wellbeing leader who has truly led from the front. This person has worked hard to banish stigma and support colleagues

The legal profession is known to be tough for lawyers and non-lawyers alike: burnout, stress and anxiety are unfortunately considered part and parcel of law firm life.

Russ is a Senior Resource Manager at global law firm Ashurst, working at both operational and strategic levels to ensure teams maximise profit and utilisation, and also works with the business and HR teams to minimise attrition and the need for ongoing recruitment. He is additionally Global Head of Wellbeing.

As someone who has previously experienced mental health issues, Russ is dedicated to supporting staff, helping them to recognise triggers, increasing knowledge of how to handle a mental health issue – either their own or a colleague’s – and combatting stigma and other barriers.

Russ has taken a leading role in combatting burnout, stress and anxiety at Ashurst, working tirelessly to ensure the firm is a place where lawyers feel supported and more comfortable to discuss mental health. The judges praised his work here, highlighting his “passion to do more in this space, to set the strategy as well as offer practical help to colleagues”.

After suffering a mental breakdown in part caused by overwork earlier in his career, Russ wants to help prevent others find themselves in the same situation.

This ambition is clear to see through the initiatives he has introduced.

Over the years Russ’s efforts include sharing his mental health story in an internal newsletter when he joined Ashurst in 2016, in which he discussed being diagnosed with depression. In an industry where people typically refrain from revealing this kind of information for fear of being seen as “not being able to hack it”, this was the first step Russ made trying to get the mental health conversation in law firms going.

Russ’s efforts also extend beyond the legal sector. He is a trained Mental Health First Aider (MHFA) and MHFA trainer. He has been delivering MHFA training to external clients including global banks, training more than 100 in-house lawyers so far, in addition to the more than 400 people he has trained within Ashurst.

Colleagues praised the way Russ’s passion and commitment to mental health infuse everything he does. They are impressed by the amount of time he manages to dedicate to supporting people and pushing the company’s wellbeing agenda forward.

Achievements

One of Russ’s key achievements has been rolling out the Mindful Business Charter across Ashurst’s global offices.

Ashurst’s UK office signed the charter





Russell (back row, centre, with glasses) with Ashurst's Madrid team, having just completed their Mental Health First Aider training

in 2018, with Russ leading the law firm to become one of the first signatories to the charter. He also spearheaded the global rollout in 2022, which included presenting to the board.

Russ has also presented other wellbeing topics to the board, ensuring buy-in from senior members of the firm so mental wellbeing is consistently front of mind for decision-makers and employees.

He leads other mental health-focused events at the firm, including Mental Health Awareness Week. Other initiatives include organising conscious yoga sessions, mental health awareness quizzes and organising speakers, such as Rick Moore who lost his son to death by suicide.

All of this and more led to the board signing off a new role for him: Global Head of Wellbeing. This drew praise from the judges, who said: "Great to influence the board and create a position as wellbeing head – well done."

Whether it is the firm's chair, a new joiner or a trainee, Russ handles all colleagues with the same deep respect and compassion an inspirational leader should show.

With time, Russ is seeing more people come forward to work with their mental health first aiders at work and he is a key figurehead in maintaining this momentum. ■

Judges' comments

- ✦ Russ stood out the most. The fact that Russ was able to get the firm to join the Mindful Business Charter early on
- ✦ Impressive leadership championing the wellbeing of others, helping to lead change in a work culture that's long been resistant
- ✦ Love your passion to do more in this space, to set the strategy as well as practical help to colleagues

Highly Commended

→ Emily Warren, Avanade

Shortlisted

→ Emily Howe, EssenceMediacom