

JUST a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Law firm doing its best to accommodate staff needs

RESPECT is a two-way street. At Mooloolaba law firm Munro Thompson, celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, respect is an integral part of the culture of the business.

Managing partner Terry Bethke said some lawyers thought gaining their law degree meant they had been transformed into some sort of higher being.

"I stamp that right out here. We don't have a hierarchical system in this practice ... no-one is allowed to rant and rave at other staff members, or clients. Everyone must respect each other," he said.

And that culture of respect also extends to the clients.

"Any clients who don't treat staff with respect get the sack as well," Mr Bethke said.

Creating a quality culture within businesses has emerged as a crucial factor in being able to recruit and retain staff in the present environment where severe skill shortages are impacting most industries in Australia.

But Mr Bethke said it hadn't been such a problem for his firm, with three new lawyers set to start in coming weeks.

Staff turnover is also very low by industry standards,

SECRETS OF OUR SUCCESS

Munro Thompson

with more than half the employees having been with the practice for more than five years.

"We're well known for looking after our staff, so employment agencies are happy to refer people to us," he said.

Looking after staff certainly doesn't end with creating a respectful culture.

A year ago, each of the lawyers was set up with a home office - with access to the firm's computer system - to enable them to work from home whenever they wanted. Other admin staff can do the same.

A "kids room" has been set up in the Mooloolaba Esplanade office for use by staff members' children when they are ill, or when parents are unable to book care during school holidays. All staff have access to flexible working hours and are sent on training courses and encouraged to study.

A lunch is held each month with the entire team to discuss any issues and suggested improvements, with everyone playing a



HAPPY CAMPERS: Munro Thompson employees enjoy lunch on the boss at Maroochydore's Ebb Restaurant.

PHOTO: JASON DOUGHERTY/1677524

part in decision making. Significant recognition and reward is given to every staff member on milestone anniversaries, and once a year the company holds a dinner conference for all staff, who get the afternoon off to attend.

Mr Bethke said the efforts were clearly paying off, with staff numbers growing substantially in recent years.

"We had 10 or 11 staff in

1998, and we'll have 27 when our new appointments come on board," he said.

The business plan includes growing that number by another 30% over the next two years.

And it isn't just its own business Munro Thompson is interested in continually improving.

The firm is a member of Law Australasia, an organisation of law practices in Australia and New Zealand

which Munro Thompson played a key role in establishing 20 years ago.

Mr Bethke said Law Australasia met twice a year to "talk about relevant issues and benchmark our businesses".

"We pay some of the best management minds in the country to come and talk to us about the latest trends and thinking," he said. "It's been a key element in keeping us ahead of the game."

FACT FILE:

COMPANY: Munro Thompson
LOCATION: Mooloolaba
FOUNDED: 1982 (by Barrie Munro and Pippa Colman)
STAFF: 27

SECRETS TO SUCCESS:

"We're very respectful of staff needs, including developing flexible working arrangements, and involve all team members in improving everything the firm does."