

Practice Leader Insights From MoFo's Ben Summerfield

By **Ben Summerfield** (October 19, 2026)

In this Law360 U.K. Expert Analysis series, practice group leaders share thoughts on keeping the pulse on legal trends, tackling difficult cases and what it takes to make a mark in their area.

In this installment, Ben Summerfield, head of litigation for MoFo's London office, discusses the importance of leading with sincerity and honesty, the challenge of navigating both legal and emotional issues in the most difficult of cases, and why junior lawyers should stay focused on building and maintaining strong client relationships.

The Experiences That Have Shaped My Approach to Leadership

Over nearly 25 years in law, I have had the privilege of working alongside — and across from — some truly exceptional lawyers and leaders.

Several people have shaped my approach in some way, whether through their judgement, resilience, generosity, commercial instinct or ability to bring people with them. I have also seen less effective leadership that did not demonstrate those same characteristics, and seen, felt and heard from others the negative impacts that this can have.



Ben Summerfield

Before joining Morrison Foerster three years ago, I was a global practice co-chair at Reed Smith, where I led a large team of commercial litigators. My practice has always been very international, and in that role I enjoyed working with colleagues across different offices, cultures and jurisdictions.

I try to bring my whole and authentic self to work, and to create an environment where others feel able to do the same. I have always valued sincerity and honesty from senior leaders, so I try to offer that in return. And I aim to be approachable and compassionate.

We have all been in the trenches, working toward demanding deadlines or navigating difficult moments, and it matters that people feel they can ask for advice or support without being dismissed.

My hope is that my leadership style helps create an environment that is enjoyable, rewarding and ambitious — one where people feel a genuine sense of shared ownership in the success of the office and the practice I am honored to lead.

The Most Challenging Matter I've Worked On

The nature of my practice means that there are often challenging and complex issues to navigate. Whether it is a complex, high-value, cross-border commercial dispute before the English courts, coordinating litigation across multiple jurisdictions, or acting as lead counsel in international arbitration, the work is demanding by design.

That is part of what makes it rewarding. Our team is at its best when we are dealing with difficult, nuanced and strategically important issues — and we genuinely thrive on that challenge.

There is one particular matter that stands out — both legally and emotionally, and one that I hope never to have to experience again.

Tragically, our client, who was also the principal witness on an important case, died suddenly and unexpectedly in the middle of the case. I learned about it from the news. As counselors and litigators, we are often helping people through challenging situations, but those circumstances were uniquely difficult.

Obviously, the primary and immediate concerns were shielding the client's family from the case, allowing them to grieve, and ensuring that we did everything to protect the estate and successfully defend the action. Unfortunately, we were dealing with inconsiderate opponents who did not want to press pause.

We had to change direction and navigate through the legal and emotional challenges in very difficult circumstances to bring the case to a successful outcome for the estate and family, but ultimately it was a rewarding experience.

Current Developments Shaping My Work

We are living through the artificial intelligence age, and the willingness of lawyers and law firms to embrace the power of AI is becoming increasingly significant. Used well, it has the potential to improve how we work internally and to deliver tangible benefits for clients.

Some of the more mundane elements of large cases that I was involved in as a junior associate are now, thankfully, being supported or accelerated by AI tools. That creates an opportunity for trainees and associates to have a more rewarding experience earlier in their careers, and it has huge benefits for clients.

Rather than spending disproportionate time on tasks that can now be made more efficient, junior lawyers can focus on work where they add greater value: developing technical excellence, strengthening client judgment, becoming more commercially aware, and building the entrepreneurial skills that will advance their careers.

At the same time, AI is not without risk. We need to be careful about overreliance and ensure that technology does not dilute the judgment, decision-making and professional instincts that are developed through doing client work. Those human skills remain essential.

The most powerful proposition for clients is not AI on its own, but lawyers who combine excellent judgment with a sophisticated understanding of what AI can and cannot do.

A Lawyer Who Has Impressed Me

There are many lawyers across the market with whom I have valued working, so it is difficult to single out just one. The lawyers who have impressed me most tend to share certain qualities: They are straight-talking, transparent, reliable and commercially aware. Those are qualities clients value enormously, and they are also qualities I have tried to model in my own practice and encourage in our associates.

If I were to name one, Martin Davies at Latham & Watkins was a role model and mentor in my years as an associate. I probably learned more from him than from anyone. He is a tremendous litigator, and has the ability to stand back and see what really matters, to communicate effectively with any type of audience, and to get on with anyone.

My Advice to Junior Lawyers as the Profession Evolves

For junior lawyers, technology should feel less intimidating than it does for people of my generation. There is a real opportunity for those starting their careers to immerse themselves in tools and platforms that simply were not available when I was in their shoes. Clients are already using technology in sophisticated ways, and lawyers need to be doing the same.

But my advice would also be not to lose sight of what this profession is ultimately about. Law is a client-focused industry and, at its heart, a relationship business. Strong client relationships are built on trust, judgment and human connection. Technology can make us more efficient and better informed, but it cannot replace the value of face-to-face interaction, personal credibility and the ability to build a network over time.

That is why we encourage our associates to start thinking about their development plan as soon as they qualify, devoting time and considered thought to it, and working with other partners and our attorney talent team to think about how the firm can support them on their journey as legal professionals.

For newly qualified lawyers, that might mean building technical skills, contributing to thought leadership, developing internal and external networks, and getting involved in relevant industry groups or societies. As they progress, the plan evolves: taking on more responsibility, managing matters, delivering training, developing deeper client relationships and identifying areas where they can build a distinctive profile.

The lawyers who thrive over the next five to 10 years will be those who are comfortable with technology but not defined by it. They will use it intelligently while continuing to invest in the judgment, relationships and commercial instincts that remain central to great lawyering.

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