

Webber Wentzel

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A tradition of excellence

Introduction

Webber Wentzel is one of the leading corporate law firms in South Africa, with a significant international practice. The firm was established more than 140 years ago and over the years has developed an enviable reputation as a consistent provider of appropriate and valuable legal assistance, backed by a commitment to service excellence. The firm currently employs over 320 professionals, of whom 125 are partners, in a variety of legal disciplines. Webber Wentzel has offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Rustenburg and London.

Webber Wentzel's long-standing tradition of excellence is supported by a team of accomplished attorneys whose knowledge and extensive experience ensures that it remains the legal firm of choice in Africa. A number of partners have been recognised in several business and legal directories as leaders in their particular fields of law. In addition, many of the firm's practices rank among the leading tier of South African and African law firms.



*Back from left to right: Trevor Versfeld, Murray Thompson, Ian MacKenzie, Sally Hutton
Front from left to right: George Sibanda, Lizette Brooks, David Lancaster, Christo Els*

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Webber Wentzel has never set out to be the biggest law firm or the firm that caters to all needs. Instead, it wishes to be the best at what it does. Similarly,

the company seeks the best people available to be on its team. Its retention strategy is focused around the idea of offering the most challenging legal work in the industry, allowing like-minded individuals to work together and providing the necessary support structures for staff. Remuneration is at the top end of the scale and candidate attorneys can look forward to an exciting career path.



David Lancaster Senior Partner

Years of experience: 26

Academic qualifications:

BA and LLB, Higher Diploma in Tax, Leading Professional Services Firms Executive Education Programme (Harvard Business School)

Age: 52

Mentor: Rowley Peart, his principal during articles

Time-out activities: Travel, reading, art, conservation, family time and history

Favourite toy: His Labrador, Henry

Employment history: Joined Webber Wentzel in 1984 and later became a partner in the firm's corporate services department. His previous experience includes the corporatisation of South African Airways, the subsequent sale of a stake in the airline to Swissair, the financing of the SAA fleet of Airbus and Boeing aircraft, the financing of the SA Airline fleet of A7R aircraft, the expansion of the Richards Bay Coal Terminal and the Saldanha Steel project. For the past five years he has focused on managing and leading the firm.



The firm continually re-assesses itself and is always on the lookout for new areas of work.

Leadership profile

A law firm is, by definition, a significantly different animal to a 'regular' corporate, by virtue of the fact that its shareholders are its partners. In the case of Webber Wentzel, there are 125 partners. Management of the firm is therefore under the control of a partner-elected management board consisting of a senior partner and six elected members, all of whom are equity partners. There are certain considerations in the selection of the management board: one of the elected members must be a black partner, one must be a woman partner and one must be from the firm's Cape Town office. The board is permitted to delegate its powers in certain areas of responsibility to committees.

This has resulted in a dynamic leadership team which is as well respected within the firm as it is externally.

The past few years have been challenging for the firm as it battled the recession, but overall the partners are satisfied that it came through a difficult period relatively unscathed and without any retrenchments. In fact, professional staff numbers grew during 2008 and 2009. This was due in no small part to the firm's ability to provide a consistently good service in a multitude of diverse areas. Added to that, it is meeting client requirements with regards to values-based fees and is making continued efforts in the area of transformation. It has expanded its offerings and services beyond South African borders – a move which has seen significant success.

The management board describes the firm's culture as collaborative and consultative. With 125 partners, 90 of whom are equity partners, the structure is, of necessity, not at all hierarchical and very transparent. The firm enjoys a flat structure with partners trusting the management board to make sound decisions on their behalf. 'It would be impossible to impose decisions on owners of the business,' explains Senior Partner David Lancaster. 'The management of the firm is challenging because of the very democratic and consensus-building culture we enjoy.'

Webber Wentzel is one of the only large law firms that remains a partnership. However, it is this concept of collegiality which informs a large part of the firm's culture.

The fact that Webber Wentzel has a dedicated senior partner in place is a huge advantage to the firm. Lancaster, who was elected to the role in 2006, focuses exclusively on the management of the firm rather than a fee-based practice. His ability to consider the needs of the firm at all times has stood it in good stead in the past few years. He is also the



'I joined Webber Wentzel a few years ago because this is a firm that delivers the best that South Africa can offer. Webber Wentzel is a progressive, forward-looking firm that is client-centric. By recruiting and retaining the best legal minds, Webber Wentzel delivers excellent client service, which enables the firm to attract complex and challenging work from premium South African and international clients.'

Selwyn Hockey
Managing Partner (Cape Town office)

David Lancaster
Senior Partner

Christo Els
Partner and Co-Head of
Mergers & Acquisitions

George Sibanda
Partner

Ian MacKenzie
Director: Tax

Lizette Brooks
Human Resources
Director

Murray Thompson
Chief Operating Officer

Sally Hutton
Partner and Co-Head of
Private Equity

Selwyn Hockey
Managing Partner
(Cape Town office)

Trevor Versfeld
Partner

first senior partner in the history of the firm who has been asked to repeat his term, proof of the respect he has earned from his peers.

From a human resources perspective, Webber Wentzel is in the enviable position of easily attracting talented attorneys from other firms. Its candidate attorney positions are eagerly sought after, with on average of 700 applications for just 30 positions. This means the firm is able to cherry pick the very best candidate attorneys.

'We're an attractive employer because of the quality of the legal work we're able to offer our attorneys, the training and development potential and the excellent reputation the firm enjoys,' explains Human Resources Director, Lizette Brooks. 'The more established you are in the market, the easier it is to attract good employees.'

Another trend benefiting the firm is the return of South African lawyers who were working internationally; a consequence of the financial crisis which affected international markets. 'We live in a globalised world where lawyers can work anywhere,' says Brooks.

Webber Wentzel has a human-capital management system in place and uses remuneration as part of its retention strategy.

The firm has a number of initiatives in place to reduce its carbon footprint and is, in fact, the first South African law firm to measure it. A climate change and carbon change focus group is in place to ensure that the firm continues to make every effort to reduce its impact on the environment. The firm's Johannesburg and Cape Town offices include motion sensors which switch off lights when a room is empty, for example. It is gradually moving away from paper and has implemented a recycling project and water storage facilities. Solar heating capacity is on the agenda.

Webber Wentzel is one of South Africa's top corporate social investors, contributing approximately 3,1% of profit before tax. It has a hands-on approach to the projects it supports, which include a dedicated Pro Bono Practice with the primary focus being the promotion of socio-economic rights of previously »

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disadvantaged individuals; and an advice service to budding entrepreneurs through its relationship with The Business Place. The firm also provides university bursaries, scholarships to final year LLB students, financial support to a number of specific projects at various universities and makes its facilities available annually to the Black Lawyers Association commercial law training programme. In addition, it supports the development of the arts through a number of initiatives and provides

financial and other support to communities in which its staff reside. The primary projects include the Slovo Park Crèche in Johannesburg and the Baphumelele Children's Home in Cape Town.

Looking ahead, Webber Wentzel recognises that Africa offers significant growth potential and is actively pursuing opportunities on the continent. The firm is already working in a number of African countries including Angola, Botswana, Burkina

Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Recently the firm signed a co-operation agreement with the leading firm in the Cote d'Ivoire, and this significantly extended its reach into Francophone Africa.

Lancaster says the firm will continue to live up to its vision and adopt best practices but will not be looking to grow its numbers for the sake of it. 'We don't ascribe to the view that the biggest is necessarily the best. In the legal industry, the largest firm is not always the most profitable. We'd rather be in the top position for the value of our deals rather than the number of deals we've worked on.'

Employee quotes

'Webber Wentzel's leadership style is enabling rather than prescriptive. At all levels, we are allowed, empowered and encouraged to assume responsibility, show initiative, excel and be ourselves. We are treated as colleagues and professionals – not workers and mere units of revenue.'

Johann Scholtz, Partner

David Lancaster's favourite quote on leadership is from Abraham Lincoln who said that 'No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent.'



Industry sector: Legal

Description of business activity:

Corporate law firm

Products/services offered: Areas of practice include aviation, banking and finance, climate change and carbon trading, competition, dispute resolution, employment and employee benefits, environmental and natural resources, financial regulatory, insurance and legal liability, intellectual property, international trade, IT, electronic business, media and telecoms, mergers and acquisitions, mining, energy, private equity, pro bono, project development and finance, property, public law, shipping, marine insurance and transport and tax.

Number of staff: 650

Empowerment level: 32,9%

Stakeholders: Partnership