

## Why this boutique merged with a large firm

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After merging with a larger firm, the co-founders of this boutique firm reflected on their journey as a firm – and why they eventually decided to join forces with a larger player.

Boutique law firm Bayston Group, founded in Melbourne in 2007, has merged with FCW lawyers – a move which the founders said would help them grow stronger and “keep the entrepreneurial flame alight”.

Co-founder of Bayston Group (along with her husband, Alister Bayston) Leisa Bayston said that the merger strengthens the depth of expertise that FCW Lawyers can now provide to clients.

“For Alister and I, joining FCW Lawyers has opened up opportunities across Australia, the security of being backed by a larger team and specialist support services – allowing us to focus our energy on legal work, knowing the ‘rest’ is taken care of,” she said.

Bayston Group was founded on the basis of new technology and health and wellbeing over billable hours – but Ms Bayston said these things “eventually conspired against” the firm.

“In the early days, it was new systems coming off the back of cloud-based technologies that enabled us to keep pace with the larger firms. We could leverage the technology to provide the same, if not a better, level of service to our clients more efficiently than the bigger firms. We also built a brand based exclusively on specialisation, in our case, commercial law, which is exactly what a boutique law firm does, specialise,” she said.

“But eventually, technology got big. With the rapid advancement of AI and other legal tech, we could not continue to invest in the expertise and resources needed to properly service our clients using next-generation technology. It was simply beyond what the firm could offer. Automation still requires skilled people to make it work. Technology is no longer a free kick.

“Similarly, we were very successful in building the firm on the back of an agile workforce, comprising contractors, subject matter experts, and ‘lawyer nomads’, who all enjoyed working for us on their terms and in their time,” Ms Bayston continued.

“However, the advantage we had in offering staff flexible work hours and locations quickly evaporated during and after COVID. Everybody caught up with Bayston Group when WFH became the norm rather than the exception.”

In terms of what will – and won’t change – FCW Lawyers managing principal Andrew Douglas said that whilst the office location and some practice management systems will change, not much else will.

“What won’t change is their entrepreneurial spirit and drive to provide the best service for their existing and new clients. Access to a larger team also allows Leisa and Alister to mentor and develop the younger members of the commercial team,” he said.

“FCW Lawyers is focused on strong growth across our Sydney and Melbourne offices. We both proactively discuss opportunities and are now in the position that we get approached by firms who have seen our success and are keen to join our collegiate, entrepreneurial team.”

Moreover, Mr Bayston added that merging with FCW Lawyers was “familiar” to the firm, in terms of innovation, wellbeing and “drive for people to be their best version of themselves”.

“But it also had the extra bit we longed for: smart people, entrepreneurial projects to improve client services, and a heavy investment in both people and management systems, which are generous, candid, and accountable. Law is the mechanics of humanity, but too often, its practice lacks humanity. Legal practice is inclined to be unrelenting and competitive. Something we have deliberately eschewed,” he said.

“We’re not saying the boutique law firm is dead. What we are saying is that the aspiration, values, and strengths of what we had at Bayston Group, while difficult to sustain, can be re-founded in the next generation of progressive law firms.”