

What kind of person should be an IP?

Human qualities matter more than ever to the restructuring, turnaround and insolvency profession. **Paul Brindley** explains why



Since the Insolvency Act 1986 came into force 40 years ago, the world has transformed. Technology has revolutionised how we live. Entire industries have redefined themselves multiple times. Meanwhile, in insolvency, many core processes remain largely the same. We still rely on old-style, slow-moving procedures. Our tools and culture often feel rooted in the past. It's not that we haven't changed at all. But we've changed slowly, often reluctantly. And often only under pressure from outside.

Resistance to transformation

Other professions have moved slowly, too, especially in the UK. It's almost as if the more a profession is based on *personal service*, the harder it is to evolve.

Why is that? Is it because these professions are seen as traditional? As safe, sensible career choices? Or because they attract people with a certain kind of mindset – structured, conservative, risk-averse?

Or is the issue something deeper, something structural? Are our regulators, trade associations and policymakers inadvertently designing in delay? Is our approach to professional identity tied more to stability than adaptability?

It's worth asking. Because while the world accelerates, we risk standing still.

Needed, but not always appreciated

Insolvency practitioners (IPs) are still seen by most stakeholders as necessary.

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But we're not always seen as helpful, responsive, innovative or even human. And we are not particularly well trusted. I think much of that mistrust stems from our slow pace of change, not just in systems and technology, but in people.

Because at the heart of every insolvency, there isn't just a process, there's a person trying to navigate a crisis. That brings us to the question at the heart of this article: what kind of person should be practising as an IP, in this world, right now?

People skills

When a director is in tears because they've just realised their company is insolvent, they aren't looking for a legal technician. They need someone who can listen without judgement, guide without superiority and help them regain control of their next step. Some of the finest IPs I've worked with over the years weren't the loudest or the flashiest people, or even the best billers. But they had a way of *being* with people in moments of high stress, ►

and how they went about their job changed outcomes. They didn't just close cases. They closed chapters of people's lives in a way that made space for healing and recovery. And they didn't learn that from the Joint Insolvency Examination Board syllabus.

Too often in our profession, I fear we reward commercial drive over compassion, compliance over common sense and technical speed over emotional awareness. We celebrate those who 'get things done', but are we asking, 'How do they do it?' and, 'At what cost to themselves, to clients or to our profession's reputation?'

Integrity under pressure

We all operate under immense pressure: budgets, billing targets, regulatory scrutiny. But integrity isn't only about following the law, it's about doing the right thing when the right thing isn't convenient and when no one else is looking.

That means exploring alternatives when the easy option is to charge a director for a creditors' voluntary liquidation they can't afford. It means pointing a client in the right direction when another professional would provide them with a better solution. And it means showing empathy when a client is struggling under the weight of blame and shame rather than retreating into procedure.

Wellbeing matters

It's hard to offer care, balance and judgement to others if you're running on empty yourself. Too many IPs and

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their staff are burning out, quietly, professionally, invisibly. Long hours, growing workloads, emotional strain and the relentless treadmill of marketing and compliance take their toll. And while some of that pressure is structural, some is cultural.

We've all seen the norm: late nights, alcohol-heavy networking, pride in endurance. But we rarely ask, 'Is it really working?' It's vital that leaders in the profession give their teams all the tools and support they need, whether that's efficient IT systems, clear processes or emotional support. Roles must be structured to give insolvency professionals space for a fulfilling life. If we want IPs and their teams to engage with humanity, integrity and clarity, we need to give them the conditions to thrive.

Talent attraction

If we truly want to serve clients across all industries, all financial structures and all emotional states, then we need to attract and retain IPs with a broad

mix of skills. These IPs will have the skills of an empath, an innovator, a litigator, a strategist, a turnaround expert and a technician.

Too often, we focus almost exclusively on the technician – the person who knows the rules, ticks the boxes and never misses a deadline. Sure, they're valuable, but they're not enough on their own. If we promote based only on those technical strengths, we end up with people at the top who may be brilliant at running a case file, but aren't necessarily equipped to lead the profession into its future. Unless we widen our skill sets, we risk becoming ever more precise at doing only a narrow part of what clients now expect from us – and becoming ever less relevant in today's fast-changing, demanding world.

The right kind of person

Ultimately, this isn't about other people. It's about *us*. Who do we want to work alongside in this profession? Who do we trust in the trenches when things get tough?

Personally, I'd want colleagues who are:

- Curious – not just about rules, but about people;
- Grounded in ethics, not just compliance;
- Brave enough to say, 'That might be legal, but is it right?';
- Willing to challenge poor practice – even quietly, even internally; and
- Committed to taking care of themselves and their teams so they can do this work well, for the long haul.

The world has changed and so have the needs of the people we serve. If we want to be not just necessary, but trusted and relevant, then we have to evolve faster, and with more intention. So, perhaps now's the time to pause and ask not just, 'Are we compliant?', but 'Are we the kind of people this profession needs next?'

If the answer is 'yes', brilliant. If it's 'not yet', then what an exciting place to begin.



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