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Cooneys CEO Named Law Firm Leader of the Year



Our firm is incredibly fortunate to have Cecilia Burgess at the helm as our CEO and now she has been recognised nationally for her outstanding performance, winning Law Firm Leader of the Year (<100 lawyers) at this year's NZ Law Awards.

Cecilia attended the gala dinner at Auckland's Viaduct Events Centre along with a big team of CLM partners and staff who all celebrated in style. She is humbled by the win, saying she never expected to take home top honours in what was her debut nomination.

"I was chuffed just to be a finalist and I couldn't believe it when I won! It was a special moment and proves that a female non-lawyer can lead a law firm and affect rapid and effective change."

Cecilia joined CLM in October 2021, becoming the firm's first CEO in its 100+ year history. Traditionally, law firms are run by a team of partners but having a professional CEO to oversee strategic and day-to-day operations is paying big dividends.

"The partners aren't trying to balance part-time management of the firm alongside client work and coaching their people. So I think that's really helped. We have a huge agenda for change and we've been able to get on with it because I'm not distracted by client work and I think that makes a really big difference."

Staff also appreciate having a CEO of Cecilia's calibre to speak with, who knows the firm inside and out but isn't someone they directly report to. "They can share ideas and views with me in a very open way. I have a vested interest in them succeeding so that's helpful too."

Cecilia says she's touched by the number of former colleagues who have reached out to congratulate her on winning this award. "It's very flattering and humbling. I've been lucky to work with many great people around the world who have taught me so much."

She also points out that this award cannot be seen in isolation. "It's not just about me. You can't by sheer willpower make something great if it doesn't have the raw ingredients. And I think we have a firm with a great tradition, and fantastic partners with a very progressive mindset which really helps."

CLM Partner Paul Tustin has congratulated Cecilia on her win, saying her sharp business sense has helped the firm focus on the big picture, while her empathy and warmth have dramatically enhanced workplace culture.

"Her impressive ability to multi-task ensures our firm runs as efficiently, cohesively and sustainably as possible. We are all very proud of Cecilia being awarded the Law Firm Leader of the Year. It's a well-deserved recognition of Cecilia's dedicated and inspired leadership of our firm."

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