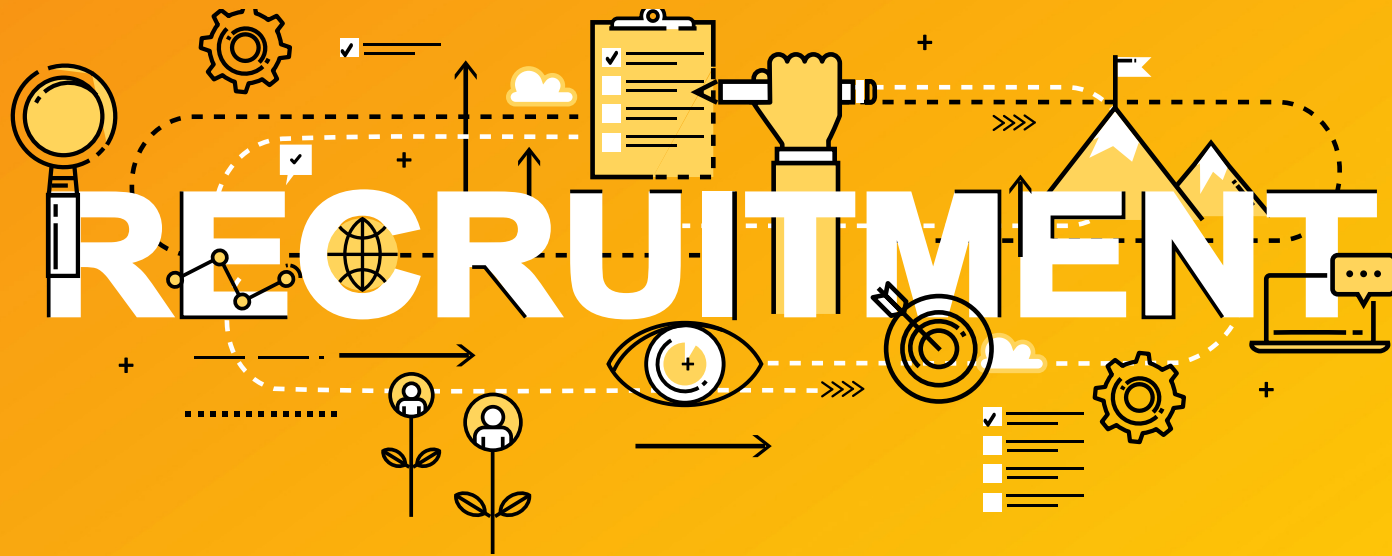


# A new vision for...



Barden's Ed Heffernan discusses the firm's raison d'être, his hopes for the recruitment industry and the firm's new Cork office.

BY BARRY MCCALL

There is a reason why we take what we do very seriously", says Ed Heffernan, managing partner at specialist accounting, finance and tax recruitment practice, Barden. "We actually believe that there is nothing as important as what we do. Think about how people or their family members feel on a Sunday night, who they work with on a Monday morning, what they take home with them from work, how they are extrinsically rewarded for that work, how long their commute is to work, if they are suited to the work they are doing.

"They say we are the sum of the four or five people we spend most time with," Heffernan continues. "Where people work, who they work with and what they do at work are hugely important to their lives. We spend 40 or 50 or more hours every week on work – we probably only spend more time sleeping.

In Barden, we have the ability to have a fundamental impact on how people live their lives. This is far too important to be a simple transaction."

Founded by Ed Heffernan and Elaine Brady in 2014, Barden is an entrepreneur-led specialist recruitment practice. The firm has grown organically into a thriving team of accountancy, finance and tax recruitment experts in Dublin and Cork, who strive every day to redefine what finance professionals should expect from recruitment.

The name Barden is an amalgam created to reflect the ethos and mores of the company. "When you're naming a company, there are three things you can do," Heffernan explains. "You can name it after yourself and we weren't interested in that; you can give it a name that means something and aspire to that meaning; or you can create a new name and give it meaning. We

chose that last option. Barden is a combination of bard, meaning poet or storyteller, and den, meaning a safe place, so we offer people a safe place to tell their stories."

The two founders had both spent long periods in the recruitment sector prior to joining forces to establish Barden. "I had spent 15 years working in Ireland and internationally and Elaine had spent 10 years working for a number of leading recruitment firms in Dublin. We both felt that the recruitment sector had become too KPI-driven and transaction-based. Not all recruiters are the same and we decided it was time for a rethink. Elaine and I share a moral compass and we decided to build a practice based on those values."

That shared vision was to create a recruitment service that put advice, knowledge and guidance first and transactions second. "In short,

Barden is a people first business", says Heffernan. "The challenge in the recruitment industry is where the recruiter is a salesperson who isn't concerned about the hopes, dreams and aspirations of the candidate; they just want to fill the vacancies on their books. We set out to create an advisory service where we work hard at understanding those hopes, needs, and dreams and how they overlap with the realities of the market."

He gives an example of how this works. "If a recently qualified accountant from one of the Big Four comes to us, our engagement begins by meeting them for a cup of coffee. We don't talk to them about jobs we might have for them. We listen to their story and understand their experience. Then, and only then, we talk to them about what they want or, sometimes more importantly, what they don't want. We often give them connections to other people in our network that might also be able to help them."

This approach pays dividends. "It's commercial altruism combined with enlightened self-interest. We have built the business on the back of referrals and recommendations from candidates and clients. Our success is firmly based on the quality of our advisory service."

Another key success factor is the tight focus of the company. "We are an inch wide and a mile deep when it comes to our degree of specialisation. We are focused on accounting, finance and tax to the point of being obsessional. We have 18 people working with us now and many of them are qualified accounting and taxation professionals. This not only allows them to share their experience with candidates and clients, it gives them a right to an opinion and that's important."

Specialisation and sector expertise delivers benefits for candidates and clients. "The Japanese for waste is muda and we take the



Ed Heffernan

That could have presented a dilemma. If he had advised the candidate to turn down the job, that would have meant a €10,000 fee for the Barden candidate's appointment. "We gave the right advice and told him to take the job. That wasn't throwing €10,000 away, it was investing €10,000 in the business. Since then, that company has become a client and the successful candidate has referred eight others to us and we've placed four of them."

The business has grown strongly since those days and opened its Cork office led by Jonathon Olden in

“” We have 18 people working with us now and many of them are accounting and taxation professionals. This not only allows them to share their experience with candidates and clients, it gives them a bit of a right to an opinion and that's important.

muda out of recruitment. Some recruitment firms will send in 10 CVs to a client, we send in two or three but we will know that the candidates will be right for the job and the client. We also invest heavily in monitoring industry thought leadership in international media to be able to share insights with our clients."

Integrity is also critically important. Heffernan gives an example from the early days of the business when Barden had a candidate in for a position with a major client. "The client came to us and very honestly told us that it had come down to our candidate and one other. They subsequently decided on the other applicant. However, that applicant called me to say that they were a bit disappointed with the salary on offer and asked for advice on whether they should take the job."

April. "The recruitment sector is very competitive in Cork but that's a good thing. We have four people working there now and the business is doing very well. Jonathan and his team share that moral compass and deep industry knowledge, and that has been the foundation for our success since the very beginning."

## Coming soon...

Keep an eye on [Barden.ie](http://Barden.ie) for the next issue of the *Accountancy Ireland Career Guide*, which is produced in association with Barden. This issue will provide exclusive career advice for newly qualified Chartered Accountants and is free to download.