

Cooking up culture with Roohi Nayak, Early Careers Development Manager at DLA Piper



The Recipe

The career cook book for event professionals
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Welcome to

The Recipe: Cooking up culture

An interview series from Broadsword where we ask events professionals to tell us the secret ingredients to their career success (and what they like to cook when they clock off).

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MEET THE GUEST



Roohi Nayak, Early Careers Development Manager

Roohi Nayak is Early Careers Development Manager at DLA Piper and has spent more than 20 years shaping global early careers programmes across Europe, the Middle East, Asia-Pacific and North America. She specialises in recruiting and developing future leaders and creating meaningful learning experiences that build the next generation of professionals.



Cooking Up Culture

Roohi leads DLA Piper's early careers programmes, using learning events and experiences, networking opportunities and events to support the development of trainees and apprentices across the firm. These programmes are designed to build skills, strengthen connections and support long-term career success.



"Each year, our trainees and apprentices come together for International Induction Week, one of the flagship programmes delivered by the early careers team. While it serves as a welcome to the firm, its primary purpose is to give new joiners the knowledge, skills and connections they need to succeed from day one.

Induction is one of many programmes we deliver throughout the year, alongside learning and development initiatives designed to help trainees and apprentices build the skills, confidence and networks they need to succeed.

My role has evolved significantly since I joined early careers as a Junior Recruiter more than 20 years ago. Today, as an Early Careers Development Manager, I help shape programmes that support the firm's future talent strategy. What I enjoy most is seeing the lasting impact these experiences can have on an individual's career.

Earlier in my career, I focused on creating engaging events. Today, I start with a different question: what is the purpose? Whether it is an induction, workshop or networking event, the focus is always on helping people succeed.

I appreciate this aspect of the role much more now. For trainees and apprentices joining the firm straight from university, stepping into a professional environment alongside very senior colleagues can be daunting. When they see the thought and care that goes into an induction programme, it sends a powerful message that they matter.

There is nothing better than helping someone feel valued at the start of their career. It shows them they are an important part of the firm's future and that we are invested in their development as future leaders. That is why the way we design these experiences matters.

People may see us as early careers attraction and development leaders, but in reality, you wear many hats.

We not only guide our trainees, oversee development programmes, and manage talent pipelines, but also help ensure the firm has the right talent for the future.

The role of people in my team can range from organising the practical details of an event to then delivering on strategies to attract, develop and retain talent over the next five years and what skills they need to be trained for."



Everybody gets a seat at the table

"It is a real challenge to make sure everyone feels engaged in the experience. You can easily have more than 90 people in the room at the same time, from different countries, cultures and backgrounds. Some of our apprentices who may be only 18 years old alongside trainees at different stages of their careers.

Networking is a big part of what we provide in these events. We have a dinner with partners where people have the opportunity to get to know each other and speak to colleagues from across the business.

We also try to make sessions as interactive as possible. Rather than simply talking at people, we run quizzes on DLA Piper and business concepts, and encourage people to learn by working together in groups. We have found that people engage far more when they are involved in the experience.

For example, instead of telling them how client matter lifecycles work, we immerse them in an actual case study. They learned more from that than me or someone else talking at them - we've realised that immersion is the best form of learning.



An extrovert might put their hand up and ask many questions. Other people are much more comfortable sitting back, reflecting on what they have heard and engaging with the people at their table. It simply means they learn in a different way. We make it clear that there is no right or wrong approach.

We also recognise that, for some individuals particularly who are neurodivergent, being in a busy environment all day can sometimes feel overwhelming. That is why we use a "challenge by choice" approach. Nobody is required to take part in an activity if they are not comfortable doing so, and people are always welcome to step out and take a break when they need one. They can also reach out to any members of the early careers team to speak to if they need support.

It's an open learning environment across the entire week. Everyone learns in their own way, and they have the ability to tailor the experience for themselves".

Following the recipe



“It starts with understanding how the firm is changing and the experience of trainees and apprentices on the programme. For me, it is not just about the feedback you receive at the end of an event; it is about gathering feedback throughout their journey that shapes the design.

Our trainees and apprentices are great at telling us what they want to learn, what worked well during events and what could be introduced later in the programme.

That feedback directly influences how we design the experience. For example, this year's induction will focus much more on practical information rather than senior leadership talks. While those talks can be inspiring, trainees and apprentices consistently tell us they want practical guidance on their day-to-day role and how they will interact with different teams and departments.

As a result, a lot of the content we may have delivered later has been moved up in the timeline.

The logistical side of the programme is also important. We always start by securing the auditorium well in advance because it is in high demand for client events. From there, we think carefully about who should deliver the sessions and whether they will be relatable to the audience. We aim for a mix of senior leaders, managers and more junior colleagues, including current trainees and apprentices to make it relatable.

We then focus on all the little details that help create a positive experience. That could be collecting dietary requirements, emergency contacts and accessibility needs, to gathering fun facts that we use in an icebreaker activity at the start of the event. It is often the small details that help people connect with each other and feel comfortable”.

"Strong collaboration also makes a huge difference. We have worked with Broadsword for several years now so they understand how we operate, the challenges we face and the level of planning involved. They are a genuine extension of the team and play an important role in helping us deliver a successful experience".

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN PRESSURE IS HIGH?

"The first thing I tell my team members is 'expect things to go wrong' and the second thing is 'don't feel like it's the end of the world when they do'.

At DLA Piper, we have four values that we live by. Be bold, be exceptional, be collaborative, and be supportive. And that supportive element is expected from everyone. So you don't have to feel like everything has to be run perfectly and let that feeling drive anxiety. Things may go wrong every now and again and you have to pivot accordingly and I have found that there are always ways around it.

For example, if speakers or trainers are unwell and cannot make it, you might need to find alternative speakers to fill in or sometimes leave the session open for people to network. It's wonderful to have a firm of people who are ready to support.

However, we are prepared for the challenges that could happen on the day. For example, we now ask all of our speakers if they can suggest a backup to take their place. Each team member has a run-sheet for the day so we are all coordinated and can pick up if someone is unwell.

We also let the trainees and apprentices know that we try our best to deliver the best experience but things can change and that's the reality of managing an event. It's not about being absolutely perfect all the time.

Yes, our audience gets value out of the event but they are employees of the firm and we expect them to support us in delivering a complex event that is one part of the entire experience".

From Roohi's recipe book:

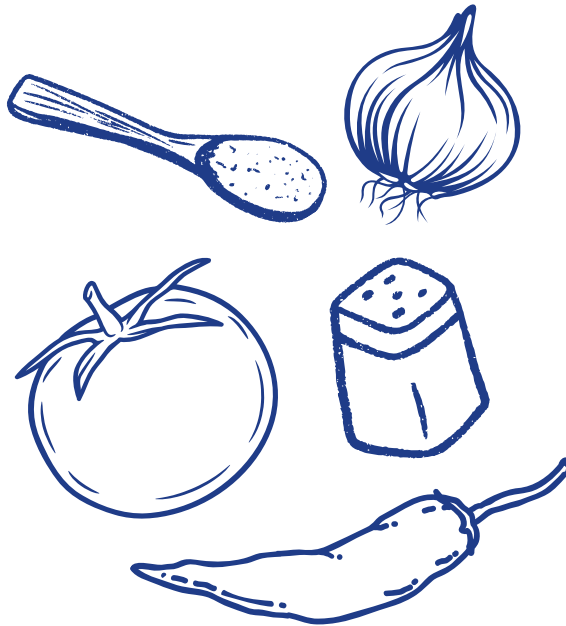
Dal Tadka

Prep time: 30 mins Cook time: 35 mins Serves: 4

Ingredients:

For the dal

- ½ cup toor dal (split pigeon peas)
- ½ cup red lentils (masoor dal)
- 3 cups water
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- ½ tsp salt



For the masala

- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 1 large tomato, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tbsp ginger-garlic paste
- 2–3 green chillies, finely chopped
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 tsp coriander powder
- ½ tsp garam masala
- 1 tbsp ghee or peanut oil

For the tempering (tadka)

- 2 tbsp ghee
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- ½ tsp asafoetida (hing)
- 2 dried red chillies
- 1 tsp Kashmiri red chilli powder
- 2–3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

To finish: salt and fresh coriander leaves



"As my husband is from the South of India, I've gotten used to adding a little bit of tamarind paste and water into my dal tadka, for a little tang"

“Dal Tadka is comfort food in my house, as it is in many Indian households. Every house has its own little twist on it.”

Method:

1. Cook the lentils

- Rinse lentils thoroughly until the water runs clear. Soak in fresh water for 30 minutes to 1 hour then drain.
- Add to pressure cooker with 3 cups water, turmeric, ½ tsp salt.
- Cook until soft and mushy in pressure cooker (4–5 whistles) or Instant Pot (High Pressure for 8–9 minutes, followed by natural pressure release).
- Lightly mash the cooked lentils and set aside.

2. Prepare the masala

- Heat 1 tbsp ghee or oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add the mustard seeds and 1 tsp cumin seeds. Allow them to splutter.
- Add the onions and cook until soft and lightly golden.
- Stir in the ginger–garlic paste and green chillies. Add the chopped tomatoes, tomato paste, coriander powder and garam masala.
- Cook, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes break down and the mixture becomes thick. The ghee or oil should begin to separate from the masala around the edges.

3. Combine the dal and masala

- Add the lentils to the masala and mix well. If the dal is too thick, add a little hot water until you reach your preferred consistency.
- Simmer gently for 3–5 minutes. Taste and adjust the salt if needed.

4. Prepare the tempering (tadka)

- Heat 2 tbsp ghee in a small pan over a low to medium heat.
- Add 1 tsp cumin seeds, asafoetida and dried red chillies.
- If using, add the sliced garlic and cook until lightly golden.
- Remove the pan from the heat. Stir in the Kashmiri red chilli powder.

5. Finish and serve: Pour the hot tempering over the dal. Garnish with chopped coriander leaves. Serve immediately with steamed rice.

THE TASTE TEST:

How do you measure the impact?

"The event is for an audience, which means the trainee and apprentice experience is critical to what the event was supposed to achieve.

So at the end of every event we run a survey around what exactly they learned from the event and which sessions within the event they found most interesting and most applicable to their journey in the future - and we receive some really strong feedback. So for example, previously they've said it was very heavy with the amount of sessions in one day. So any future events are now held between 10am and 4pm, with plenty of breaks in the middle. High quality feedback is a success outcome and it indicates if the event achieved what it was supposed to. One of the questions we asked them is, do you feel more capable of integrating into the firm? Do you understand the firm more than before?

The best way is to see the audience's faces on the day and speak to them. We also do a quick daily survey each day of the event with questions like what was the best session of the day, rather than the old school survey that gets sent out after the event is over as they are less likely to fill this out and forget parts of the experience. Basically, we have stopped with long surveys sent after the event and only ask relevant questions on the spot.

Once we finish the event, we evaluate what the experience was like across the five days and refine.





We also meet with them at the midpoint of every rotation and go through their experience on the rotation itself and the event that they attended. We ask them to look back and tell us if there is any other learning that could have helped them now from the induction point? We've acted on this holistic feedback and we got a high 9 out of 10 NPS score on key things that we included based on their feedback. Trainees and apprentices tell us that they are very glad we acted on the feedback.

Ultimately the trainee and apprentice programme is the primary source of associate hiring at the firm. The impact that we have on the firm is already quite brilliant, but one of the things I would love to do, with AI advancing, is have the opportunity to make training more immersive and bespoke especially as the way this generation learns is completely different. Gone are the days where learning is delivered through two hour workshops.

One of the key things I want to make a difference in is making training accessible and interesting for everyone. Reinforced training over a period of time for example is much better than just a single long format day. So I'm hoping that through changing the ways in which we deliver things, we might be able to change the way in which people learn. We'll be able to use AI and technology to develop training and sessions much more efficiently and can tailor it to this learning style and help next generation trainees and apprentices learn skills easier."

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A place where creativity and strategy merges to create events that bring your brand to life and serve customers up immersive, unforgettable experiences



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