

Management Challenges in Hiring and Retaining Talent

BECAUSE THIS MAGAZINE publishes separate issues focusing on leadership and management, I am opening this column by reminding readers of the difference between the topics. Leadership is typically about motivating and inspiring a group of people to seek to reach a set of organizational goals. Key skills include the ability to motivate, inspire and empower others. Management overlaps in certain areas with leadership but differs in that management involves organizing and coordinating organizational activities so that things actually get done in a manner consistent with organizational goals.

In law firms, leadership and management are often taken on by the same individuals. It is helpful if those leaders spend time developing good leadership skills as well as good management skills. In the management realm, hiring and retaining talent is often a significant challenge for law firms.

It is true that the approach to hiring lawyers, paralegals, administrative personnel and technology personnel has changed. We used to hire law clerks in their first year of law school, keep them employed through law school and then offer them a position as an associate. For a long time, we had success with this approach. Then, suddenly, four years in a row, we had our incoming associate hired away at the final hour. It took us all four of those associate losses to realize that we needed to rethink our hiring practices. We completely changed our recruiting, hiring and compensation practices. Now, for example, we've expanded our recruiting to forums that we had not traditionally used.

We also engaged a consultant to assist us in evaluating our hiring and retention practices. A revolving door is expensive and results in poor service to clients. A really helpful conclusion that came out of our strategic planning was a total focus on our core business and hiring to serve that core business. (We had been hiring some good people whom we liked and trying to make them fit rather than really thinking through exactly what we needed and how to find them.)

Retention is the challenge we are working through currently. Generally, we are throwing out traditional notions of culture based



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on everyone billing a certain number of hours. Instead, we are focusing on strategies that will create the possibility of keeping key players in place even as they go through various life phases.

Part of the hiring and retention challenge will always be about compensation. Getting creative about streams of revenue as well as how to compensate for differing skills will make a long-term difference in hiring and retaining law firm talent.

The articles in this issue of the magazine all address issues that impact managing law firms, with a particular focus on creative ways to improve hiring and retention. Brooke Moore's article, "Managing Virtual Legal Teams: A Roundtable Discussion," provides a perspective on virtual workforces as a method to better serve clients and broaden the talent pool available to law firms. Multiple law offices have become more

common, even for smaller firms, and Matthew Driggs provides strategies for effective leadership of multiple offices in “Managing Multiple Offices: 5 Strategies Every Leader Must Know.” Hiring the right person for the right seat remains a challenge for many law firms. Daniel Schwartz’s article, “Hiring Doesn’t Take 20/20 Vision,” summarizes hiring strategy from defining the job through advertising, interviewing and making the offer. Sabrina P. Rockoff’s article, “A Sense of Belonging: Stopping Your Firm’s Revolving Door,” makes a case for why every law firm should practice what it preaches and have an up-to-date agreement reflecting the governing provisions of the law firm. Accountability, transparency and a sense of belonging can go a long way in keeping younger attorneys. In “Have You Looked at Your Partnership Agreement Lately?” Michael Speker reminds us of some of

the key provisions that should be considered in reviewing law firm governing agreements. Finally, Mark E. McMickle illustrates important reasons why it might be time for a law firm to hire a professional manager.

I would like to thank Dave Christensen, Tom Grella and Michael Speker, the issue team, for their dedication and hard work.

Collegially Yours,

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