

Attracting the next generation of legal talent.

Evolving your legal organization to recruit future top lawyers.



For years, the legal profession has been notorious for 80 to 100 hour work weeks and heavy emphasis on racking up billable hours. However, this old standard is now conflicting with a new generation of lawyers whose expectations around work-life balance don't necessarily match that of their predecessors. Recent law grads are more and more interested in careers that offer more flexibility, yet firms continue to set demanding schedules that lack the balance today's generation seeks for their work life. While neither firms, nor lawyers will completely change or adapt to one another, both groups will need to compromise to achieve shared success and legal employers will need to institute some operational and culture shifts to win the impending recruiting and retention challenge.

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— American Lawyer Magazine

Understanding Generation Y.

Many recent law school graduates share characteristics common among their Generation Y peers. They expect and thrive on positive reinforcement and constant feedback from others, especially management. As studies suggest, they often welcome a challenge, tire of routine tasks, expect quick

rewards for their effort, and feel little long-term commitment to employers. However, they are capable of intense and high quality work.

Younger lawyers also have different professional views. According to a recent study of 63 independent law firms by legal consulting firm, Edge International, about 44 percent of younger lawyers rated "having time for personal lives" as extremely important, compared to 19 percent of partners. They see their lives outside work as important, and are typically less willing to have personal interests play second fiddle to work.

However, law firms are often more hesitant than other employers to accommodate the need for more work-life balance. According to professional services consultancy Hildebrandt International, firms have seen annual profit increases for the last ten years. To do so, firms must satisfy clients, and that means having sufficient legal talent who are highly productive and hard working.

The law firm challenge.

According to The National Law Journal, the number of associates in the 250 largest U.S. law firms jumped by more than three quarters over the last decade. However, the number of law school graduates increased by only 7 percent, making recruitment very competitive and expensive. American Lawyer Magazine recently reported that firms spent upwards of \$250,000 last year to recruit a single summer associate. Graduates have enough options

Attracting the next generation of legal talent

that only 28 percent of them take offers to join big firms. Add high turnover to this scenario — with over half of the departures unwanted by the firms — and that makes meeting goals for billable hours even more challenging.

Furthermore, and contrary to traditional recruiting strategies, law firms can no longer simply solve this long-term recruiting and retention issue by waving money and prestige at recruits. While new graduates may be more apt to take these sorts of positions right out of school as experience and resume builders, more and more, their long-term life goals do not match up with the 2,000+ billable hour requirements enforced by major law firms. When demand so far outstrips supply, even the most successful firms cannot afford to limit their tactics to buying loyalty.

Meeting in the middle.

Even if money were plentiful, compensation alone simply does not captivate younger lawyers. Law firms that want to retain a competitive edge must find new ways of recruiting and retaining talent. New lawyers who want the opportunities that go along with working for a law firm must recognize that they must be willing to shoulder a reasonable amount of the billable burden.

Because attitudes are nearly impossible to change in the abstract, it is necessary for law firms to consider new ideas and techniques that can help both sides meet in the middle:

- **Support personal lives.**

Talking only about career advancement and money can send the wrong signal to younger lawyers. Smarter firms emphasize such

benefits as daycare, maternity and childcare leave, domestic partner coverage, and personal time off. These benefits are not only attractive to new recruits, but can also help retain lawyers who have been in the firm for a while, and who are considering having children.

When it opened a child care center, Alston & Bird actually increased its retention rate by a full 6 percent among lawyers making use of the facility, compared to associates overall. Given that a commonly quoted rule-of-thumb cost for recruiting and hiring a new lawyer is \$300,000, the gains can be substantial.

- **Provide career alternatives.**

Creating alternate career tracks for associates is another successful trend. Some firms let associates work shorter hours with prorated compensation while remaining on a partner track. Those who fear that all their younger lawyers will take the “easy” way out should look at a study by the Project for Attorney Retention of the Center for WorkLife Law at the UC Hastings College of Law which showed large Washington, D.C.-based law firms that offered reduced hour tracks found that most attorneys stayed on the traditional path.

- **Recognize professional interests.**

Partners often assign interesting work to the lawyers they already know and delegate routine tasks to younger associates. Although the newer attorneys need to learn the basics and do their share of the necessary but unpleasant tasks, taking their professional interests into consideration helps develop them more fully and makes them feel appreciated.

Attracting the next generation of legal talent

- **Let operations support recruitment and retention.**

Some relatively small changes in how a firm operates can make all the preceding efforts succeed. For example, strong mentoring from partners and advanced associates can give the newer lawyers the attention they need and help them understand where they should compromise and change. Making use of temporary legal and paralegal personnel can help you cover the less sophisticated legal work, and keep clients satisfied, while providing better opportunities for younger attorneys.

How does your workplace stack up?

Want to know whether or not your organization would fall high on the “employer of choice” list for the next generation of legal talent? We’ve outlined a list of important questions that can help you assess how your organization is doing and where you can improve.

- What are the demographics of your workforce? Gender? Generational? Marital/parental status?
- How high is turnover at your organization? At what level are the majority of people leaving?
- During exit interviews, what is the reason people most commonly cite for moving on?
- What sort of work-life flexibility opportunities do you offer your employees? Does everyone have the same access to these benefits?
- Does everyone at your organization have the same billing requirements?
- How much maternity/paternity leave is offered to employees?

- Do you provide a formal mentorship program for your staff?
- Do you sponsor at-work networking groups as an outlet/resource?
- Have you conducted an internal employee satisfaction survey?
- How often do new employees come from internal referrals?
- How often do former employees boomerang back to your organization?

The legal profession continues to thrive, with thousands of new lawyers entering the workforce each year, and firms relying on this talent base to provide the exceptional counsel, litigation, research and client service that keeps their operations flourishing.

While new lawyers will need to adjust to the rigors of their profession, employers cannot sit back and expect to recruit and retain top talent without making the right investments in becoming an employer of choice for workers of all generations, not just because the salary is right, but because the culture matches their work-life priorities.

By putting themselves in the shoes of the next generation of legal talent, law firms can find ways to accommodate the expectations of their recruits even as they meet their own needs, and those of their clients — safeguarding the future in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

For more expert advice on managing the diverse generations in today’s workforce, contact Ajilon Legal today at 866.GO AJILON or visit ajilonlegal.com.