

Recruiting: Striking a Balance among Talent, Culture and Motivation



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Those charged with bringing talent into an organization have a tremendous responsibility. Many legal administrators realize this and put themselves in strong positions to develop and influence their law firms' recruiting strategies.

Ultimately, finding a person with the right mix of skills and experience for a position represents only part of a sound law firm recruiting process. The candidate must also have a good "cultural fit" and "motivational fit" within the organization. Striking a balance among talent, culture and motivation is critical, and an administrator who can develop recruiting guidelines that clearly define the "fit" factors will have a powerful impact on finding and hiring the right people.

UNDERSTAND THE FIRM'S CULTURE

A sound recruiting strategy begins by having a clear, concise understanding of your firm's culture. The administrator in many law firms is considered the "expert" on the company's culture and is the ideal person to develop the strategy.

No company's culture is the same; it is influenced by the leadership team and the trickle-down effect that permeates the entire organization. For instance, when it comes to time spent in the office and a focus on work-life balance, firms' approaches can differ significantly. If your firm's typical work week at the executive level comprises 60 to 70 hours, and a newly hired employee has been accustomed to leaving the office after working only 50 hours per week, a major cultural disconnect can occur.

A REALISTIC PICTURE

To make better hiring decisions, you must be honest with job candidates and paint a realistic picture of work life in your firm. For example, if you are recruiting an attorney, and your attorneys are expected to work between 60 and 70 hours a week, you might begin by asking the following questions:

- "Approximately how many scheduled hours per week were you required to work in your previous position?"
- "In our organization, attorneys typically work about 60 hours a week. How do you feel about that?"

If the candidate does not feel comfortable with your firm's approach on this issue, then he or she may not be a good cultural fit.

In some firms, stress levels are very high due to the nature of the work environment. In others, the environment and key leaders may be more relaxed. If your candidate thrives in fast-paced, challenging work environments, he or she may be bored in a low-stress environment. He or she could possess all of the right

skill sets and experience, but would be a poor choice based on the lack of a cultural fit.

ASSESSING SKILL SETS

Let's assume that a candidate's cultural fit seems ideal. How do you determine if the person's skill sets – the "job fit" – are appropriate to the position being sought? Strong interviewing techniques will get the candidate to reveal details that will help you to make the right decision.

For instance, a candidate's résumé may indicate that he or she won 85 percent of litigation cases handled during the past five years. Good interviewers will ask the candidate to give two or three examples of the top cases he or she won and specifically what the person did to win those cases. Do not settle for general or vague answers; dig deeper to get the details.

Another technique is to ask situational questions – what he or she would do in a hypothetical situation. This forces the candidate to not only draw upon his or her past experience, but also requires quick and creative thinking. This approach will measure the candidate's intelligence and tests his or her ability to adapt to challenging situations.

MEASURING MOTIVATION

A key third factor for administrators developing a sound recruiting strategy is "motivational fit." Is the person ultimately excited about the opportunity? Many factors can influence motivational fit – from commuting times to office design to the firm's compensation and benefits package.

If you ask the candidate the proper questions, you can ascertain any motivational fit concerns. For example, you might ask, "What are the top five things a law firm needs to be your employer of choice?"

THE BOTTOM LINE

Well-planned recruiting strategies ultimately boost employee retention and decrease turnover costs, and they are vital to a law firm's long-term economic health. Law firms grow or shrink based on the quality of their executives, attorneys and administrative staff, and they often retain or lose clients based on their service levels.

Net profits increase or diminish in direct proportion to the quality of hiring decisions, and a law firm without a sound recruiting strategy jeopardizes its long-term growth and prosperity. *

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