The background of the page is a blurred photograph of several people in a meeting or office setting. The image is out of focus, showing silhouettes and soft colors of clothing and hair. The overall tone is professional and collaborative.

Recruiting & Onboarding: The Benefits of Successful Hiring

As the economy continues to recover from the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–08, the legal market is picking up the pace when it comes to recruiting and onboarding. From an almost frozen hiring model to now a more nimble and optimistic outlook, lawyers are starting to see more opportunities as firms and companies enter a post-recession hiring environment.

This fresh landscape boasts new candidates with different perspectives and priorities – no matter the year on their bar number. From seasoned laterals to recent law school grads, recruiting and onboarding in 2015 is all about skills, fit and the future.

After defining the necessary legal skills, the next step is identifying other characteristics that a successful candidate will possess.

The United States Department of Labor’s Occupational Outlook for lawyers suggests that “employment of lawyers is projected to grow 10 percent from 2012 to 2022, about as fast as the average for all occupations.” This means that nearly 75,000 lawyers will enter the workforce by 2022. For both lawyers and those hiring them, these figures are exciting. As firms and companies focus on their own unique needs and cultures, they should keep a few key factors at the forefront to help ensure that the time, effort and money spent on recruiting and onboarding pays off.

Know Your Needs

Successful hiring begins long before any interviews. It is absolutely imperative that the first step of hiring is building

consensus about the position you need to fill, including the legal skills required. Why is this the first step? Simply put, lawyers new to a firm generally get work from other lawyers; if the firm’s current lawyers have input regarding the new hire, they will feel comfortable and invested in providing work for him or her. Additionally, having a list of skills in any job posting encourages the right types of attorneys to apply. If five years of experience is needed, then say so and use this requirement as a filter when resumes are submitted.

After defining the necessary legal skills, the next step is identifying other characteristics that a successful candidate will possess. For example, what are the general traits of attorneys at your firm? Is fit important to you? If so, does this mean attitude is important? What about coachability? List out all of these “soft skills” for good measure to help those doing the interviewing stay focused on what the firm really wants and needs. When all is said and done, if you can mix legal skills with soft skills, you can create a new hire recipe for success.

Interview Well

Once resumes are selected, what is the next step? From initial phone interviews to reference checking, make sure your process is highly streamlined. Also, it is worthwhile to keep in mind the balance between keeping the firm or company informed of the process and respecting that attorney time



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can literally equal money. Pay close attention to the time attorneys dedicate to conducting, interviews and discussing hiring decision to ensure it is not counterproductive. Communication throughout the process is key, and having a solid team that interviews and makes the decisions is clutch.

Socialization will help the new hire build relationships, which is the building block for a successful future.

A game plan for scheduling, organizing resumes, questions to be asked of each candidate, and interview scoring sheets can assist as well. Each firm and company will approach this process differently, which is what makes each workplace so unique from the start, but the overall goal is to have communication and a timeline in place from the very beginning, with each person involved informed in their role.

After the interviews, there is the opportunity to make a meaningful call to not only the person chosen for the job, but also to those who spent the time interviewing but will not be offered a position. Of course the first call should be to the candidate selected, and no other calls should be made until that person accepts. However, once the new hire has accepted, it is valuable to spend time calling the candidates

who are not being offered a position to offer a professional courtesy of thanking them for their time and wishing them well in their job search. I have heard from many colleagues on the receiving end of these types of calls, and all have said that that this approach, as opposed to a "rejection letter" or a quick call from a non-interview panel member, makes positive difference in future relations.

Prepare for Arrival

Selecting a date for your newest team to start is the easy part – then the real preparations begin. To make a new hire feel welcome is worth a significant investment of time in thorough planning. From communicating before arrival about what to expect, answering questions, scheduling a photo so that their bio and welcome ads can coincide with their start date, to setting up a support system is encouraged. Firms and companies invest a great deal of time and money in recruiting and onboarding, so having an end goal of a happy, excited new employee should be a top priority. Also, it can be really helpful to tell a new employee that the company is invested in their success from the start, and that any and all feedback is encouraged so that the process can continue to improve each time. Giving a new employee a vested interest in future processes will undoubtedly set a positive tone from the start.

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Have a Plan

Preparing for a new hire's arrival is not enough; the second part is the implementation of the overall plan. First, introductions are a must. It is nice to have a managing partner, executive director or the new hire's mentor take the new hire around the office first thing in the morning of his or her arrival. Then, after meeting everyone, it's time to get down to business. One way to make the most of the first few days is to use a schedule. This schedule can outline times that different team members will meet with the new hire to go over office policies, procedure and practices. Mixing up the information with different people – including IT, secretaries, paralegals and attorneys – allows the new hire to meet new colleagues and exposes him or her to the firm's culture.

Setting up a welcome lunch or happy hour can add to the hype of a new hire, and this will also give everyone something to look forward to and build morale. Engaging new hires immediately is smart, and setting them up with a support team (perhaps an attorney and staff mentor) can help the new hire learn from the pros straight from the start. Also, socialization will help the new hire build relationships, which is the building block for a successful future. Training, orientation and relationship building are what I call the new hire success trifecta.

The first few days can be full of information – none of which will be billable. It is essential to remember that attorneys have a way of feeling worried if they do not have

billable work, so planning out a few “first assignments” for them can help them combat this feeling while showing their immediate value to the firm – a feeling any new hire welcomes. As mentioned earlier, asking them for feedback, at every stage of the process, is helpful. Providing them with an opportunity to improve the process, and to ask questions, can greatly influence their overall first impressions and long-term view of the firm or company.

In the end, recruiting and onboarding is really all about planning for the future. Meeting the needs of clients, enhancing internal culture and developing industry leaders are all primary functions of hiring – from a long-term perspective. Setting hiring goals and then tracking progress throughout recruiting and onboarding sheds light on pieces of the puzzle that are going well and those that need extra attention. Successful hiring takes many tools, people and procedures; like all things, nothing is a sure thing. However, when planning and preparation meet initiative and foresight, a firm or company can impact their workplace in a very positive way when onboarding new hires.

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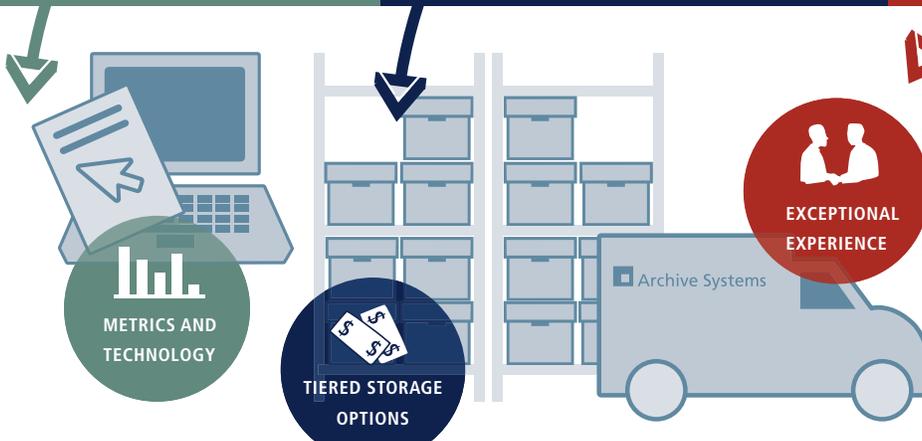
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