

Outplacement:

Goodwill can go a Long Way Toward Marketing



By Diane Costigan

Layoffs, reductions in force and terminating underperformers are sound business interventions, but as we saw with the 4,000-plus attorneys who were affected by layoffs between 2009 and 2010, they need to be done strategically and with great care, or the backlash can be devastating on both sides of the equation. To help facilitate this transition, many law firms and legal departments offer outplacement counseling to their terminated attorneys. This service can be provided by either internal or external professionals who have training and experience in career counseling and in-depth knowledge of the legal industry and its complexities.

Outplacement assists with all phases of a job or career transition. It typically covers the following:

- ▶ Resume and cover letter development and review;
- ▶ Assessment of career goals and factors that will influence success;
- ▶ Developing a job search strategy;
- ▶ Designing a networking strategy;
- ▶ Interview preparation;
- ▶ Application assistance;
- ▶ Advice on how to use recruiters effectively;
- ▶ Decision-making support; and
- ▶ Accountability and support.

For many reasons, outplacement is beneficial both to the attorneys who receive it and the firms or legal departments who offer it.

1 Softens the Blow

There is no easy way to deliver a termination message. Providing resources to help ease the transition can help to mitigate the blow of the message. The opportunity to work with a professional career coach can help relieve some anxiety. An outplacement counselor can also help the attorney quickly process what has happened, reframe their circumstances, put things into context, move into action and shift perceived blame away from the employer.

Losing a job can also raise psychological and emotional issues for clients. Sometimes clients need to rebuild their self-confidence after the blow of losing a job that was their primary identity. At other times, they need a reality check about unrealistic expectations. At the worst, this recent legal market has seen a number of

suicides in the media. Outplacement counselors are trained to support clients through these difficulties, including making referrals to appropriate healthcare professionals, if necessary.

2 Alumni Relations & Business Development

Similarly, providing outplacement creates goodwill that is pivotal for alumni relations. From the first day of employment, an attorney will forever be associated with his or her employer. Whether an attorney leaves by his or her own decision, from a marketing perspective, employers will want to ensure they are receiving positive press from their alumni. In the tight-knit legal community, it is in an employer's best interest to help terminated attorneys end up in advantageous positions. The happier alumni are with their departure, transition and next job, the more likely they will be to speak highly of their former employers. For law firms, in particular, having alumni placed with clients or future clients, can help solidify, rejuvenate or even expand the flow of business.

A new consideration with respect to this market and outplacement will be recruiting future talent. The competition to attract the top law students will always be fierce, regardless of market conditions. Savvy students interviewing in the future are going to ask potential employers whether they provide outplacement assistance to laid-off attorneys. The answer to this question may be a deal breaker for students to whom job security is a key motivator.

3 New Market, New Rules

With technological advances, heightened financial pressures and a saturated market, job hunting is more complicated than ever. Employers or recruiters post jobs online, which can be a frustrating and confusing process. In the past, attorneys could use two or three recruiters in a search. Today, candidates who apply online to jobs posted by recruiters can end up working with 10 or more. Keeping track of online applications and which recruiters have sent résumés where can be a full-time organizational endeavor.

Outplacement counselors can help clients navigate this potential minefield by answering questions, providing

sample organizational charts and even scripting conversations for recruiters who may not be operating above board. In the current market, however, to eliminate heavy placement fees, job seekers should avoid using headhunters if possible. This puts tremendous pressure on tapping a client's network and creating a more active search than he or she may be used to, or expecting.

The other new consideration in this market is the use of online social networking. Sites like LinkedIn help clients expand and leverage their contacts. LinkedIn is a critical job-search tool with which many clients are not yet familiar. Similar to résumé and cover letter assistance, outplacement counselors help clients come up with the most effective professional profiles and provide guidance on how to capitalize on the other functions of the site such as joining groups or searching job postings.

4 Quicker Turnaround and Increased Satisfaction

Terminated attorneys can find jobs more quickly than when left unassisted, particularly when they receive counseling from professionals who have deep expertise working with lawyers, their psychological profiles and the specific issues they face. A main benefit of

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outplacement is that it keeps the attorney accountable and disciplined. A skilled counselor will keep clients on track through a thoughtful combination of constructive feedback and support and will know how to maximize the value of job searching activities.

In addition, based on assessment data and a clear set of criteria on which to base decisions, counselors can help clients ensure their job choice leads to the right position. Accordingly, clients will end up with higher job satisfaction because they will choose jobs that meet their stated career goals.

A good outplacement counselor will also help clients ensure they begin their next job with the proper tools and knowledge they need to be successful. By using assessment information and having a clearer

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PRACTICE EVOLUTION





Family: *Exocoetidae*
 Order: *Beloniformes*
 Class: *Actinopterygii*
 Genera: 8, Species: 52
 Habitat: Fresh & marine water

The flying fish adapted to its environment by growing wings. Known to glide for hundreds of meters and at speeds topping 60 km/h, this family of animals thrives today because it can soar high, away from predators.

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understanding of what might have gone wrong in the previous job, counselors can help clients come up with an integration plan and share best practices.

5 Professional Development Skill Building

We often hear from clients that outplacement is the first time they have received professional help with thinking through their careers. Lawyers get so busy doing their day-to-day jobs that they often forget to think about the bigger picture of their careers. Outplacement counseling helps clients prioritize what is important to them through both self-directed and formal assessment. For example, are they driven by the specific content of the job; the type of environment in which they work; having a mentor; compensation; or other factors. By understanding their own personality preferences, interests, values, strengths and development areas, attorneys in transition can come to more meaningful decisions about both short-term and long-term career goals.

Going through a successful job search also helps clients develop skills that will be invaluable throughout their careers such as networking, business development and self-promotion. For example, networking is not a skill that many lawyers enjoy or have spent a lot of time developing. Outplacement teaches clients effective net-

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working and business development skills—even as basic as scripting and rehearsing conversations. Outplacement counselors also help clients methodically prepare for interviews by crystallizing how they add value.

Outplacement can have a tremendous impact on an attorney's career during an otherwise difficult and unpleasant time. Not being alone, having a built-in support system and someone to ask questions and bounce ideas off of can make a huge difference in any job search but particularly one that is employer-generated. Many clients tell us that being laid off and going through outplacement was one of the best things to happen to their careers—and often they were grateful to their employers for providing the assistance. ■

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