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Making Your Laterals Sticky: Best Practices in Lateral Integration

NALP Annual Meeting
Seattle, WA
Thursday April 10
9:15 – 10:30 am

David Cruickshank, Diane Downs and Mike White

LATERAL ASSOCIATE ORIENTATION PLAN

Pre-Arrival Checklist – one week before arrival
Local office set up & stationary
Internal marketing
Line up work assignments
Make partner & peer assignments

Local Office Orientation – first two days
HR Orientation
IT Orientation
Partner & Peer Advisor Lunch
Portal Pictures
Library Orientation
Local attorney recruiting & development manager welcome

Semi-monthly Check-In – weeks 2 – 11
A staff member will check in with the new attorney to make sure they have sufficient work and to answer any questions they need answered. Make ongoing introductions in the office and throughout the practice. This is often the attorney development manager but depending on the practice/office, it could also be the HR manager or work assignment coordinator.

Attorney Development Welcome Meeting – end of first 90 days
In person or VC meeting with the Director of Attorney Development to cover the welcome agenda:

I. Overview of the Professional Development Framework
  a. Core Competency Framework
  b. Benchmarks
  c. Training
  d. Work assignment processes
  e. Evaluations/Self-Evaluations
  f. Individual Development Plans

II. Overview of the Firm
  a. Offices & practices
  b. Firm Management and committee structure
  c. Marketing/Practice Playbook

III. Entrance Interview Questions
  a. Was there anything particularly helpful that we did as you arrived at the firm?
  b. Was there anything that we could have done to make your transition easier?
  c. Are there any orientation issues that I can help you with now? Any outstanding questions?
  d. Were there any processes or practices at your previous firm that were easier/more helpful to your practice that you want to let us know about here? (ie: document processing, file managment, technology etc.)
  e. Are there any firm activities that you were involved at in your last firm that you want more information about here? (ie: recruiting, teaching, associate's committee)

Ongoing Integration: check in as necessary throughout the evaluation and development planning process.

Lateral Partner (Business Development) Integration

What do the law firm and the newly recruited lateral need to do in order to be successful?

by Michael J. White, Esq.

In a recent EIC article, I discussed the frustrations law firms experience in successfully recruiting desirable lateral partners; i.e., **relatively** few quality laterals willing to move for the large number of interested firms. The previous article laid out some strategies firms can adopt to be more successful in the recruiting land grab for lateral partners; however, once recruited, what do the law firm and the recruited lateral need to do post-recruitment in order to be successful? How can both firm and partner set, and have fulfilled, expectations that will cause each to ascribe unambiguous success to the relationship?

The below checklist lays out a framework firms might consider adopting in some form to create a track record of success with lateral partner integration efforts, and in so doing, make it easier to recruit the next desirable lateral partner. These checkpoints are relevant during the recruiting process, and become operational tactics during the onboarding process.

"It Takes a Village"

- Establish shareholder commitment to an ongoing intentional level of lateral partner support and awareness
- Is lateral partner success important enough to us that we'll actively participate in causing it to occur?

Clear definition/articulation of why the firm is unique; the "Value Proposition"

- Define, educate, document
- What makes us special?
- How does our differentiation translate into reliable and practical commercial advantage? How does it make it easier to bring work in the door?

Establish lateral integration committee

- Small is desirable
- Sends clear message that firm is serious about lateral success

- Allows for ongoing feedback from lateral, particularly in early stages; two-way communication and managerial channel

Best practices intake

- Have dedicated discussion with lateral recruit about organizational and managerial approaches he/she has seen at previous firm that "work" that he/she would like to see adopted

Synergy analysis

- Assessment of practice group/sector/partner synergies to be jointly developed by firm and the recruited partner
- Exchange information on, and educate about firm clients and recruited partner clients
- Identify target rich clients; identify synergistic sectors/practice groups
- Assess collaboration appetite of relevant firm relationship partners/synergistic practice group partners/synergistic sector partners; create core list of clients, sectors, practice groups, and partners related thereto based on
- Validate presumed synergies through meeting with relevant partners

Integration/synergy plan

- Create opportunity-specific tactical plan
- Post-recruitment: how will recruited partner and firm collaborate on identified opportunities after recruited partner moves over?

Law Firm Partner Accountability

- (synergistic) Partner-specific concurrence
- Ongoing commitment - what is the nature of the accountable partner(s)' commitment?
- Bonus construction - how can the accountable partner benefit financially from providing desired support?
- The "collaborating partner commitment" - can the accountable partner(s)' commitment be documented?

Communication Strategy

- External
    - Website
    - Non-website external communication of announcement
- Internal communication of successes along way

Lateral Partner Objectives/Plan

- Separate from the integration / synergy plan, the recruited partner creates this document to define success over a meaningful period of time-specific objectives, strategies, and tactics, and the resources he/she will need to accomplish them

Documentation

- "What makes (law firm) different?" one pager
- One page description of the law firm lateral partner integration philosophy/elements
- Collaborating partner commitment document
- Opportunity plan
- Synergy analysis checklist
- Lateral partner objectives/plan

Contact the author, Mike White

Lateral Partner Integration: Beyond the Book of Business

Six lateral integration practices that are critical to making new lateral partner "stick"

Edge International Communique (June 2013)

by David Cruickshank

The most-discussed and most-measured aspect of moving a lateral partner to your firm is that lawyer's book of business. It dominates the recruitment discussion, the initial client transitions and the financial measures in the first 6-18 months. Can we get from the promises of the recruiting phase to the reality of a "better than average producer" after a year? The focus on that success measure can cause firms to under-perform on other important features of lateral partner integration. In the face of recent estimates that only 28% of lateral partner moves succeed, what more can firms do to make sure that the partner and her clients "stick"?

My colleague Mike White addressed business integration processes for laterals in this space recently. I want to address *six practices* that go beyond financial performance, but which are equally critical to making the lateral partner stick.

1. *Pair the partner with a one-year "buddy.* This partner

should be separate from the partner who is accountable for business integration. The buddy should be from a different practice group, but with same or similar target clients. The buddy's job is to interpret firm culture, introduce cross-selling opportunities, host the lateral through the first annual meeting, etc. You can write a job description that works for your firm.

2. *Assign the lateral to mentor a strong associate.* This gives the lateral a chance to pass new ideas from past practice to the next generation - and fulfill a firm investment goal at the same time. I say "strong associate" because your lateral will not have enough time for extensive training and development work.
3. *Pick the lateral's brains after period of breaking in.* There are many opportunities to pick up best practices from other firms. I once observed a lateral from Latham in a new firm who easily out-performed his colleagues in handling associate evaluations (25 litigation associates a year). Why? Because he had acquired the techniques and discipline at Latham. Then bring these ideas to management to see if you can't absorb this free competitive intelligence.
4. *Be able to describe your firm's standards for client relations and ask the lateral to implement those standards and exceed them.* Many firms have developed expectations for client service and relations. Not just "tickets for ball games," but return call times, frequency of updates, technology connections to key clients, and dedicated teams are some examples. If you have standards that exceed the client's former firm, his clients are in for a pleasant surprise.
5. *Give the lateral a committee or project assignment.* What are her interests and talents? How might they match with recruiting, marketing, or business process analysis? Perhaps a pricing project or a major RFP would fit for

someone who has strong financial skills. This assignment will bring the lateral together with partners of similar interests, but cut across clients or practice areas. The assignment also says, "We want firm investment as well as billed hours."

6. *Train or coach the lateral in team leadership.* The lateral's long-term success will come from leveraged or co-operative teams in practice. Yet very few partners receive leadership training so that they can excel at this critical skill. Bring in a trusted trainer and coach to help meet that gap, where it exists.

7.

Your firm invests a lot in getting a lateral to join you. You might even say you do a decent job of initial "on-boarding." And you will certainly be monitoring financial performance. These six lateral integration practices might make the lateral want to stick around for years to come.

David Cruickshank helps firms with lateral talent growth strategies and introduces the plans and tools that promote strong lateral integration.

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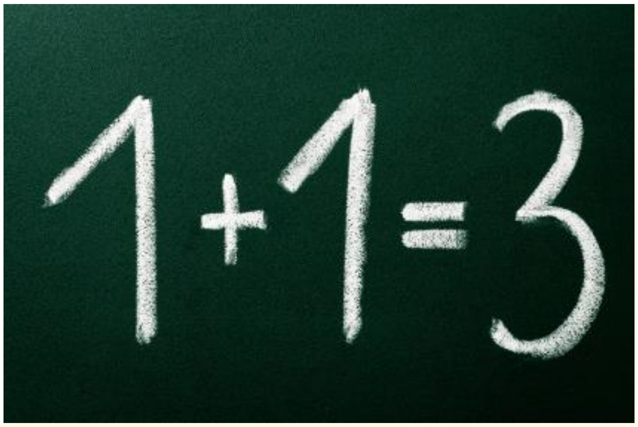
Lateral Partner Recruitment Frustration

Recruiting firms need to avoid the "hope is a strategy" mentality when onboarding lateral partners.

By Michael J. White, Esq.



The law of supply and demand is alive and well in the land grab for partners who bring with them books of business that will be accretive to a new employer. Firms can't declare victory at the recruitment stage - they are responsible for making "1+1=3" so that the new partner is in fact accretive. Lateral partner business development integration is a process that is often ignored, and on those occasions when it is not ignored, is usually executed poorly; both firm and new partner end up disappointed with each other.

Lateral Partner Recruitment Yield

There are manifold reasons sought-after partners don't make the leap over to law firms. At bottom, however, their calculus is generally informed by an assessment of whether the recruiting firm's platform will cause them to be more successful than their existing or some other firm platform. Effective business development "integration" can be achieved through a process that i) maps out explicitly where are the practice, function, and industry-level synergies relative to a particular lateral, ii) assesses which partners associated with the synergistic areas are capable of collaborating meaningfully with the lateral in this regard, and iii) injects accountability into the process for making the collaboration work around sound business development principles in which both sets of partners see value.

A recruiting firm has to avoid the "hope is a strategy" mentality when onboarding a lateral partner. Realizing synergies and discovering truly incremental business are products of intentional, process driven, and disciplined effort. Good lateral partners know this and quickly want to get past the "chemistry" determination so they can assess whether a firm can really help them be more successful. "Which partners at the firm are willing to be accountable for my success?" "Does the firm have a plan to help me make 1+1=3?" "Does the plan make sense?" "Am I an experiment or has the firm developed and used good processes with other laterals to cause them to outperform?" Lateral partners want to see evolved thinking, capability, and process in place to have confidence the firm can "make good" on the shared expectation for success they both embrace. Recruiting firms have to be able to transcend the noise in this regard in order to outrecruit other very good firms that are courting the same lateral partner talent. Law firms that come to these discussions armed with documented process, methods, and plans, as well as with comp plan incentives that give legacy partners good reason to take an interest in the business development integration effort, will win more of their share of these human capital pursuits.

Lateral Partner Client and Business Development Integration

Laterals face (at least) a couple of daunting challenges as soon as they start work at a new firm. First of all, their understanding of the firm often remains embryonic for a long period of time. Secondly, they don't know where to begin to solve challenge #1. "What is it I need to know about the firm in order to begin to identify collaborative opportunities that will generate real prospect opportunities for me and the firm?" "How do I map out a collaborative business development process and implement it recognizing that I can't easily hold the collaborating partner accountable for executing the process?" "How do I drive and sustain the process with these new collaborating personalities without becoming a distraction to them?" For example, a recruiting firm that has a market leading transactional estate planning practice may enjoy a differentiating capability - a capability that can be introduced into many target relationships in the right way by non-T&E lawyers; this could be a very effective way to grab a starter engagement with a new prospect. These collaborations will not happen passively unless an unusual firm culture is in place, and firms will need to be very intentional about causing this kind of "dot connecting" to occur in a meaningful way. So get to it law firms! Stop selling aspirations, good feelings, and vaporware to lateral recruits; start selling process, accountability, alignment, and planning discipline centered on business and prospect development integration!

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