

Combating “Default to Disconnection”: Tactics for Building Trust on Legal Teams



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▶ **Big firms lost 24% of their associates in 2021.**

Source: 2022 Report on the State of the Legal Market by Thompson Reuters (23.7% turnover for associates in Am Law 100 firms).

Why did they leave?

~~To explore
the world~~

~~Bigger
raises~~

~~Lower
hours~~

Why did they leave?



- ▶ But post-pandemic, many firms still lack a *systematic* approach to building team culture.



The Default to **Disconnection**

▶ **The Default to Disconnection**

A mindset where people expect, and are accustomed to, minimal engagement and interaction at work.

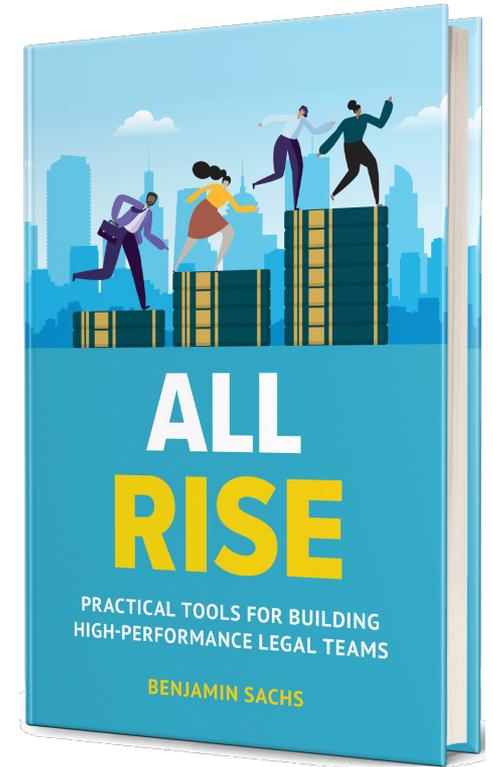
▶ The Default to **Disconnection**

A mindset where people expect, and are accustomed to, minimal engagement and interaction at work.

They are not only disengaged; they **don't want to be engaged.**

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- ▶ Author of *All Rise: Practical Tools for Building High-Performance Legal Teams*
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To overcome, we must:

- 1 Understand the default to disconnection
- 2 Refine our approach to hybrid work
- 3 Align on best practices for building stronger, more engaged legal teams

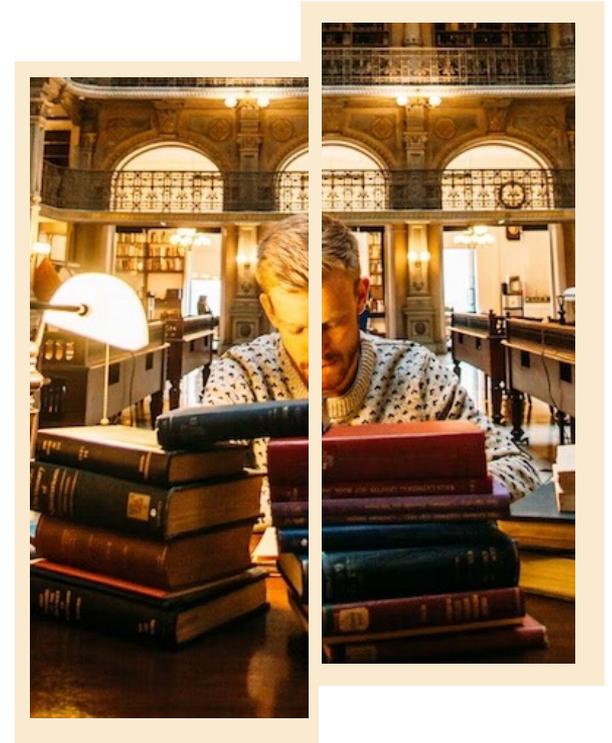


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We are seeing it in law schools

- ▶ Post-pandemic life has not returned to normal
- ▶ Recent graduates have learned to focus on work, not play
- ▶ Faculty and staff spend less time in offices, reducing student interaction

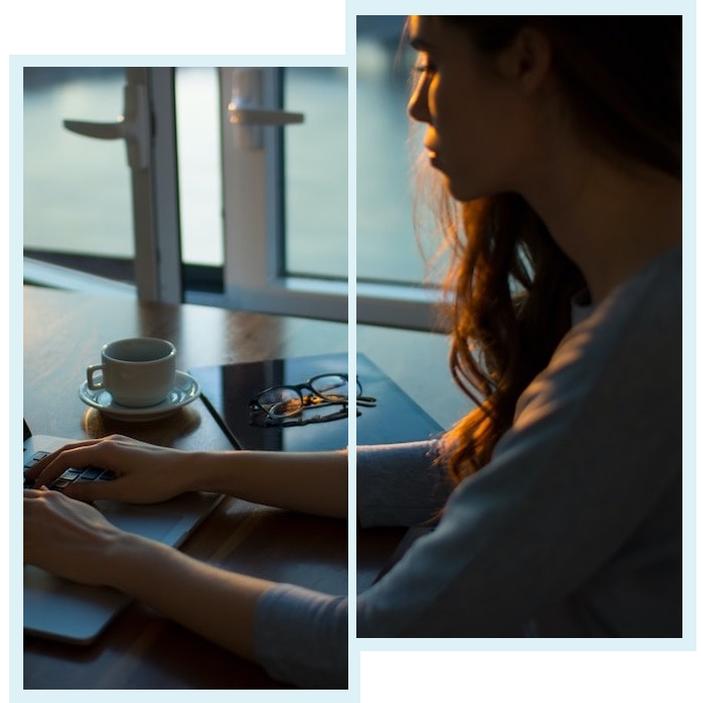


Law firms feel it all levels

- ▶ New associates are “more D [DISC] than ever”
- ▶ Veterans have adjusted to working with minimal interaction
- ▶ Team members do not own or invest in their own culture

The *disparate impact* of disconnection

- ▶ Reduced visibility exacerbates DEI concerns
- ▶ People focus more on “their circle,” not the rest of the firm
- ▶ Those without support have fewer people to turn to





“People literally
don’t *see me.*”

What's your post-pandemic report card?



1. Is *social engagement* as strong as it was pre-pandemic?
2. Are attorneys getting the same level of *mentorship*?
3. Are they just as *committed* to the brand and mission of the org?

Summary: Signs your team members are exhibiting a default to disconnection

- ▶ Transactional view of the office: “get in, and get out”
- ▶ Silo mentality: focused on “the work,” not “the firm”
- ▶ Lack of ownership over team culture, especially from juniors

Discussion

- ▶ What are you seeing on your teams?
- ▶ Do you expect these trends to continue, even in a recession?

▶ Our view: we have to *adapt now*, not wait and hope the world spins backwards



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▶ Does this sound familiar?

CEO presents final
return-to-office plan



Four Hybrid Work Traps

1. Focusing on “attendance” as the primary success metric

The problem with focusing on attendance

- ▶ Can seem tone-deaf, invoking generational disconnects
- ▶ Global policies lack flexibility at region/group level
- ▶ Hard to enforce without costly management effort



Then-CEO Howard Schultz expressed annoyance that employees had *ignored an earlier request* to return to the office. While an agreement [for 1-2 office days per week] had been reached last year, badge swipes indicated many employees “are not meeting their minimum promise,” he wrote.

Other metrics to consider

- ▶ Retention rate of high-performers
- ▶ Participation rate at social activities
- ▶ Survey questions focused on engagement/development
 - E.g., percent who agree that...*
 - ▶ *“My team is highly collaborative”*
 - ▶ *“I am getting the support and mentorship I need to grow”*
 - ▶ *“I have close, personal connections at the firm”*

Four Hybrid Work Traps

1. Focusing on “attendance” as the primary success metric

2. Confusing “flexibility” with “chaos”

Example guidance for 50% in-office time

- ▶ Office Days: 1 day per week set by at firm/office level (*e.g., Tues*)
- ▶ Team Days: 1 day per week set by practice/team (*e.g., Wed*)
- ▶ Choice Days: 1 day every other week set by individual (*your pick*)

**This kind of clarity encourages habit formation
without being entirely top-down**

Four Hybrid Work Traps

1. Focusing on “attendance” as the primary success metric

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3. Thinking that “if you build it, they will come”

You cannot just put out a watercooler

- ▶ Today's attorneys are more likely to eat lunch at their desks and leave happy hours early
- ▶ When hosting events, provide specific activities that encourage—even force—interaction. Examples:

Weekly Lunch Programming

(e.g., lunch & learns, sharing big wins, and icebreakers with rotating hosts)

Cross-Functional Mixers and 1:1s, e.g., Friendly Donut

- ▶ Where possible, host events earlier, even during 9-5

Four Hybrid Work Traps

1. Focusing on “attendance” as the primary success metric

2. Confusing “flexibility” with “chaos”

3. Thinking that “if you build it, they will come”

4. Missing opportunities for learning and iteration

Execute, measure, diagnose, and iterate

- ▶ Lawyers seek perfection in external work product
- ▶ Internal management needs a different mentality
- ▶ Need space for *experimentation and growth*
- ▶ Track success metrics, share with PG leaders, and embrace continuous improvement

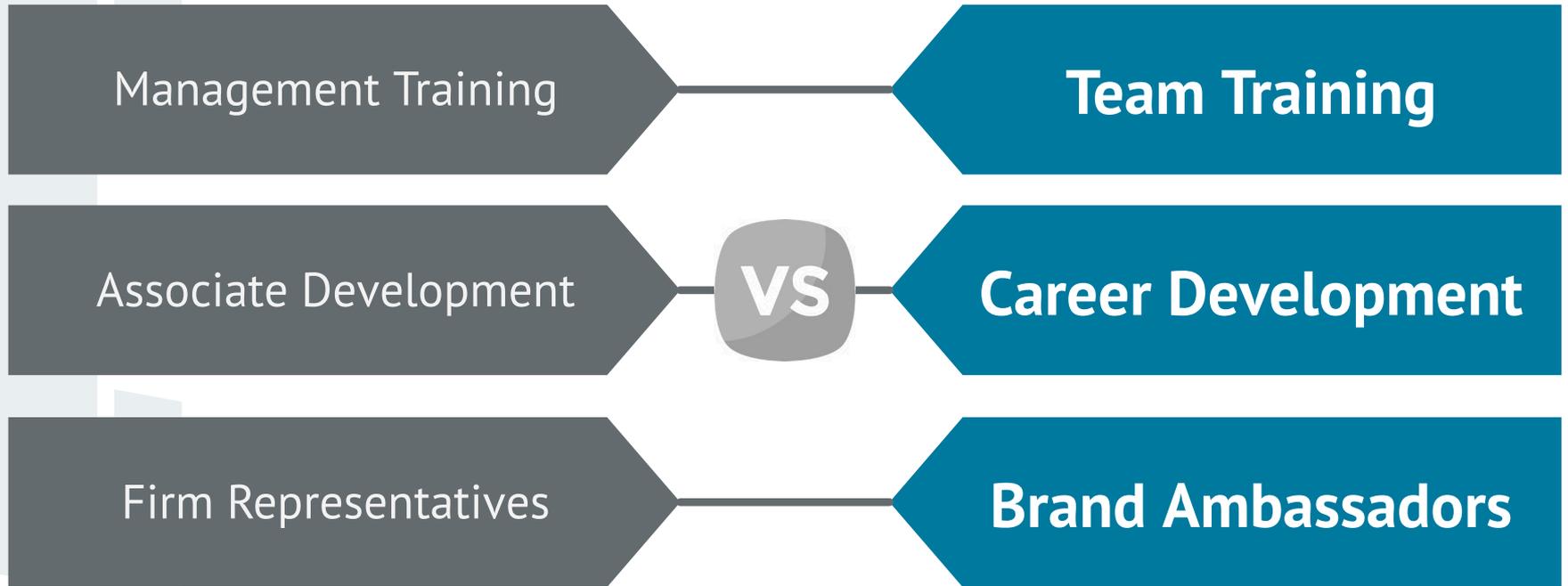
▶ Warning: Hybrid work brings out an organization's *lack of organization*.



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Modernizing our Approaches



Key Traits of High-Performance Teams

Accountability: Hold each other to high standards

Productive Conflict: Challenge each other's ideas

Ownership: Put the team's goals above personal goals

Trust: Are comfortable being honest and vulnerable

Why management training falls flat

Partners/Counsel

Senior Assocs.

Midlevel Assocs.

Junior Assocs.



Management training tends to focus on a single cohort

Team training focuses on a practice group (or other team)

	M&A	Litigation	Telecom
Partners/Counsel			
Senior Assocs.			
Midlevel Assocs.			
Junior Assocs.			

Advanced of team-centric training

- ▶ Zero in on each team/PG's unique challenges
- ▶ Ensure partners are in the conversation
- ▶ Leave with *commitments* on specific actions

Advanced of team-centric training

- ▶ Leave with ***commitments*** on specific actions

**Implement "retrospectives"
after major milestones**
(e.g., deal closing or litigation filings)

**Build a central repository of
best-practice templates**

**Align on a new process for
managing weekend coverage**
(e.g., Friday check-ins)

**Build trust by sharing
personality or working styles**
(e.g., create "Working With Me" slides)

Working with Ivan Iverson

MBTI: INTJ | Enneagram Type 6

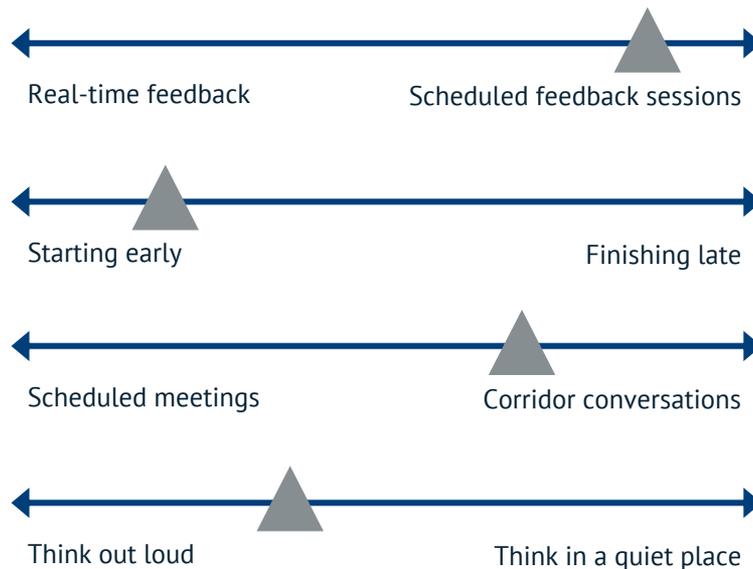
Background and Interests

- 2 kids: Aubrey (5) and Bo (3)
- I love playing basketball. Hiking is a close second.

Working Styles

- I don't like to work late at the office.
- I usually start checking emails around 7 am and stop around 11:00 pm.
- My least productive time is 4:30-6:30 pm – I try to exercise during this time.
- I don't mind weekend emails, just be clear about deadlines and goals.
- I am very punctual, being late is a pet peeve.

Personal Preferences



Next: Modernizing *career development*

- ▶ Today's work-centric lawyers can miss the big picture
- ▶ Help them set/execute career goals, even beyond the firm
- ▶ Training can also focus on skills that differentiate them (beyond “the legal work”)

Example: Teaching a rigorous approach to *building a position of influence*

1. Be reliable
2. Be a connector
3. Be adaptable
4. Be open

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Experience

	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
1. Be reliable	Deliver timely, accurate work for every request	Start with “yes” and volunteer for more	Become sought-after for experience or expertise
2. Be a connector	Connect the dots within tasks (spot dependencies)	Connect dots across the team (drive collaboration)	Connect dots across the client or firm (cross-functional connections)
3. Be adaptable	Be open to change	Help others handle change	Lead conversations about change, even for your own role
4. Be open	Ask for help	Embrace 360 feedback (receiving and giving)	Coach others through their own difficult conversations

Turning attorneys into *brand ambassadors*



- ▶ People like their teams; we have to get them to like *their firms*
- ▶ Involve associates (even first-years) in hiring, and provide talking points
- ▶ Evangelize values, strategy, and history

▶ When we treat attorneys like cogs in a wheel, they *act like* cogs in a wheel

Additional recommendations for law schools

- ▶ **Get firms to sponsor events**

Affinity groups have been reaching out more than ever

- ▶ **Think local (“small circle”)**

Would you rather have 150 mildly engaged students or 40 highly engaged?

- ▶ **Offer practical skills sessions**

E.g., working in teams, working with staff, etc.

Summary: Combating the Default to Disconnection

Recognize the Default to Disconnection

- ▶ Treating office as “get in, get out”
- ▶ Heads-down, silo mentality
- ▶ Lack of ownership over team culture

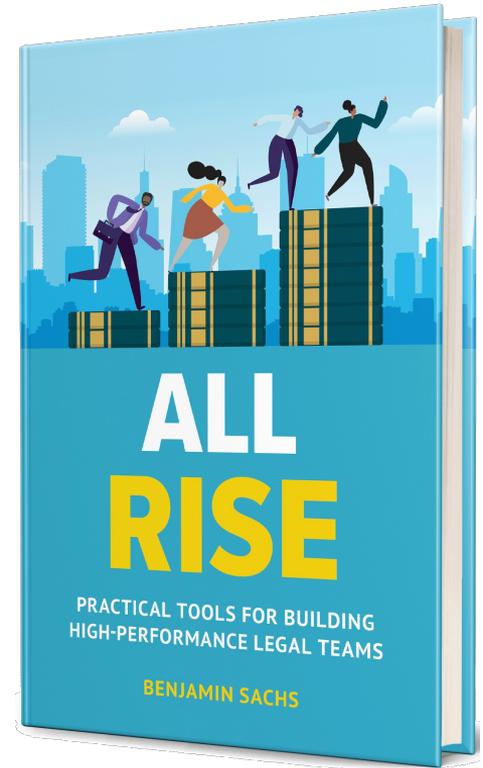
Avoid Pitfalls in Hybrid Work

- ▶ Focus on metrics beyond attendance
- ▶ Be prescriptive with guidance & activities
- ▶ Learn, measure, diagnose, iterate

Modernize How You Build Your Teams

- ▶ Team-centric training (*not “mgmt. training”*)
- ▶ Career development (*not “associate development”*)
- ▶ Brand ambassadors (*not “firm representatives”*)

More tools for legal teams
at AllRiseBook.com



AllRiseBook.com

Continue the conversation with us



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