

Training Your Recruiting Team

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“It’s amazing to me, but as the stakes have risen, the quality of the interviews has gone down,” one law school Career Services Director reported to me. And she was not alone. In an informal survey of law school career services and placement offices all over the country, I found that in the opinion of both students and administrators, the quality of on-campus interviews had decreased as the competition for the top students increased.

But the stakes remain incredibly high. In the July 8, 1999 edition of *The New York Law Journal*, it was reported that White & Case had raised the bar in the New York firm salary wars by setting entry level salaries at \$110,000. This new number made me think very hard about what the placement directors had told me.

Poor interviewing has two important consequences: First, poor interviewers cannot capably select the best candidates for second round interviews. Second, poor interviewers cannot effectively sell the firm in the recruiting process.

Perhaps the firms are hoping that the high salaries alone will sell the firm. But students will tell you that it is the *people*--the interviewers--who really sell the firm. When most firms are paying similar salaries, a key differentiating factor is the way they *feel* about the firm after the interview. Was the interviewer pleasant, respectful, and knowledgeable? Did he or she offer insights on why the firm was a good place to work, learn, or progress? Did the candidate think

the questions he or she was asked reflected a knowledge of what the firm was looking for in future hires? Did the student leave the interview thinking, “I’d like to work with that person”?

For the candidate to have had such an experience, the interviewer would have needed to prepare for the interview. There would have been a discussion--probably several--among all recruiting team members about what the firm is looking for and which selection criteria should be applied in the screening process. There would have been a review of interviewing techniques, including resume review, interview planning, question development, and candidate evaluation. There would have been brainstorming on what differentiates the experience at this firm and which among its strengths should be highlighted for candidates in the recruiting process.

If this is not representative of the process your recruiting team is undertaking to prepare for Fall recruiting, you may want to consider whether some training might give your team a competitive edge. The attributes of exceptional interviewers are skills which can be learned and honed.

Knowing Who Is Successful

Having a clear idea of what the firm is looking for is one of the first areas that should be addressed. The profile of the successful associate may differ for each firm. Being able to identify candidates who will fit

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into your culture, who will be motivated to succeed in the firm, and who have the intellectual capability to do the work is both an art and a science.

Many attorneys who interview law students or laterals will tell you that interviewing is intuitive and that they do not need formal training to teach them these basic skills. Unfortunately, many interviewers employ their intuitive art, yet neglect the more scientific process of weighing both quantitative and qualitative evidence presented by each candidate. Key factors such as suitability for private practice, cultural fit, and intangibles such as maturity and judgment are often sacrificed in interviews dedicated to intuitive responses to a candidate's personality. Thoughtful training interventions can help recruiting teams to identify and effectively use their firm's profile for success in the recruiting process.

Interviewing Techniques

Poor interviewers do not read the resume in advance, they have few or no prepared questions, they do too much of the talking and fail to let the student describe his or her strengths, they cannot answer questions about the firm, and they frequently begin the interview by saying, "*So tell me about yourself.*"

Carrying out an effective screening interview requires preparation. Careful review of the resume directs the

interview plan, focusing the attention of the interviewer on key issues that require clarification or that cannot be determined from the resume. The development of thoughtful questions in advance of the interview allows the interviewer to relax and elicit the most useful information from the candidate. No one – I repeat, *no one* -- can read a resume and come up with insightful questions as he or she sits in front of a candidate. What he or she *can* do is insult the student by wasting precious interview time.

Knowing how to ask questions and what not to ask are other important issues for on-campus hiring teams. Poorly phrased questions or insensitive or offensive questions will end the interview on a sour note at the very least. Following up each interview with a thoughtful evaluation is also a critical skill. Giving thought to the firm's selection criteria and using them to consistently evaluate each interviewee will provide meaningful information that can be used to make smart decisions on call-backs.

Selling the Firm

Money aside, what is it that would make someone want to work for your firm rather than another? What factors differentiate your firm from others in your city or in the practice areas that are your focus? These and many others are the questions that law students will be asking as they sign up for interviews this Fall. They want to make informed choices, and it is in the best interests of your firm that they do so. Many lawyers who leave their firms after only a few years do so because it was a poor match in the first place.

Developing your firm's "message" is all about identifying the unique strengths, advantages, and opportunities for growth you have to offer the candidate while still presenting a realistic picture of the work experience he or she will encounter. Giving students a clear idea of what it is like to practice in your firm is the best way to ensure that those who choose to come there have informed expectations.

Knowing who is successful, utilizing effective interviewing techniques, and developing a unified recruiting message are all ways to ensure that your hiring team will be successful this Fall. Training the team is the best way to develop or refresh these skills.

As the stakes go up, I believe the quality of the interviews should follow. Firms need to take active steps to protect

the unprecedented investment most are making in recruiting legal talent. Providing initial training or a refresher course for all interviewers will allow the team to focus the efforts of all involved and invest their time and attention in the important task at hand. In our next survey, we hope **not** to hear that the interview quality on campus declined again in Fall 1999!

Managing Your Professional Development (An Open Letter to New Law Graduates)

Congratulations on your success in law school, and welcome to the profession it prepared you to join.

Even after law school, you will find that learning is key to your success. The first four years of practice, analogous to the period of internship and residency in medicine, are the time when you truly become a lawyer and consolidate the fundamental knowledge, skills, and values of the profession -- your start-up intellectual capital. You will spend the rest of your career adding breadth and depth to those capacities and developing new ones to keep up with change and the competition.

When you think about it, law school is a "cafeteria" learning experience. Pay for the meal ticket, show up at mealtime, ingest (and hopefully digest) what's dished onto your plate. Some of the chewing can be tough, but the menu is orderly and predictable. Ever wonder why academic classes are called "courses"?

Although learning continues to be necessary after law school, it will never again be so preordained, organized, and convenient. If the student is a cafeteria patron, the continuing learner is a hunter-gatherer. Living off the land, so to speak, requires an entirely different approach and skill set.

Consider the fact that in traditional academia, all the resources for learning are provided by the instructor. The skills for which students are rewarded are the abilities to (1) listen uncritically, (2) absorb, retain, and regurgitate information, and (3) predict exam questions.

Only the second of those learning skills is useful in practice, and it is less useful than many others. It is said that once Albert Einstein, asked for his phone number, went to the phone book to find it. When the requester expressed surprise, Einstein responded that he didn't believe in cluttering his mind with anything he could look up. The moral is that if you devote your learning energies to absorbing an encyclopedic store of data, as a client

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counselor and problem-solver you will be about as useful as a phone book.

As to learning resources, in law practice you will find they are the following:

- (1) knowledgeable people,
- (2) work assignments and other practical experience,
- (3) self-study resources, and
- (4) formal education and training.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the first two: people and hands-on experience. In most law offices, getting optimal access to them requires interpersonal skills that were not important in school. Moreover, the good communications, relationships, and confidence you establish with your number one learning resource, other people, will facilitate access to your number two learning resource, challenging work that will stretch your capacities, and to numbers three and four as well. The single best thing you as a new graduate can do for your own development is to build a mentoring relationship with one or more role models in your chosen field and actively seek their guidance in pursuing the kinds of work, self study, education, and training that will do the most to strengthen your abilities. The second best thing is to unfailingly take the initiative in clarifying assignments and getting feedback from supervisors.

As to the third learning resource, your self-study options are more robust and varied than for any graduating class in the history of the profession. A wealth of print and electronic materials is available to help you keep up to date in your specialty and expand your knowledge and skill base, such as books, periodicals, video- and audiotapes, interactive CD-ROMs, and on-line resources. These tools permit you to access much of the learning you need at the time you need it and at your own pace. Many of them will no doubt be available from your current employer, as will good advice on which to choose and

how best to use them.

Finally, traditional formal instruction, face-to-face or via distance programming, can still convey valuable knowledge and skills in an organized, convenient package. You can go back to the law school for an occasional bite in the learning cafeteria (see the article on law school courses below). A vast menu of additional selections, in the form of the CLE courses listed after that, is available to you as well. And if your employer and/or professional association systematically provide high-quality educational programming responsive to your needs, consider yourself well provisioned indeed.

Because the learning options are so diverse and so numerous, and because your goals, talents, learning style, and circumstances are different from anyone else's, you will have to decide carefully what is best for you. Planning and selectivity are also necessary because, as you

may already have noticed, time is the most scarce resource in the law office. The first priority for your time and that of your mentors and other colleagues is to get the work done; that is what all of you are paid to do. In contrast to law school, it is not your "job" to learn, nor theirs to help you.

Yet it is also true that the time you spend learning your craft is the best investment you can make in your future satisfaction and security. For your seniors, the time they spend coaching you and supporting your development is a worthwhile investment for them as well, because it makes you a more capable and productive subordinate in the future. For you and for them, the future starts with your next assignment.

*(NOTE: This article is adapted from one first published in the December 1994 issue of **The Capital CLE Calendar**. Reprints are available.)*

Professional Developments

With this inaugural issue, a new publication is born and an old one takes new form. **Professional Development Quarterly**, the new print publication, will include expanded coverage of professional development and continuing education topics and *The Capital CLE Calendar*'s CLE course schedule and sponsor directory. *The Capital CLE Calendar* will henceforth be published electronically seven times a year in two formats: a word processing text edition of the course schedule and sponsor directory, and an intranet (HTML) edition with expanded content and features. More information is available at our web site, <<http://www.profdev.com/pubs.htm>>. A demo version of the intranet edition is available from us: call (703) 719-7030 or e-mail <marag@profdev.com>.

As we go to press, the **Professional Development Consortium** and the **Association for Continuing Legal Education** are holding back-to-back meetings in Boston. The conference of the PDC, an elite national association of experienced in-house lawyer training managers, takes place July 29-31. The ACLE conference runs from July 31-August 3 and includes a day of educational programming for in-house training managers on August 2. ACLE membership includes both in-house and CLE provider representatives.

The National Association for Law Placement and Business Development Associates are co-sponsoring a **Law Firm Associate Management Summit** in Chicago September 23-24. Faculty includes managing and hiring partners and consultants. For more information, contact BDA, Inc., 301-565-2299, e-mail <BDACCI@aol.com>.

American Lawyer Media's **Law News Network** is offering free 30-day trials of three new "Practice Centers" on the web, in TechLaw, Employment Law, and IP Law. Advertised features include weekly practice updates by e-mail, breaking news from American Lawyer publications and the Web, new case law from federal and state appellate courts, legal analysis, and selections from PLI coursebooks. Law News Network also promises future Corporate Law and In-House Counsel Centers. It is located at <<http://www.lawnewsnetwork.com>>. (*Note:* The former Counsel Connect and Law Journal Xtra! sites have also moved to this location.)

Regional MCLE Update

The **New York** CLE Board continues to update its information available on the Web, but the site has moved to <<http://www.courts.state.ny.us>> now that its former Law Journal Xtra! host site has closed.