

# A good associate is hard to find

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Productive associates are invaluable to the success of a law firm. The work and billable hours they contribute are vital to the firm's profitability and reputation. Unfortunately, many law practices fail when it comes to keeping quality associates for more than two or three years, which is generally the pivotal time when an associate's efforts begin to pay off for the firm. To hold on to these valuable assets, implement policies that strengthen the hiring process and promote individual development within the practice.

## **Fish in a larger body of water**

When hiring an associate, expand your pool of potential applicants. While an Ivy League education and law review are impressive traits, they are not completely telling about the abilities of a new hire. In fact, these applicants are generally more likely to leave your practice within a few years of employment. Why not consider a practicing attorney who brings years of experience to the table or a graduate from a second tier school whose ambitious personality meshes perfectly with the culture of the firm? It is a mistake to immediately dismiss these candidates without consideration. Broaden your parameters and your hiring pool to get the best collection of candidates.

## **Make an effort to smooth the transition**

Once the perfect addition to the firm is hired, take time to adequately integrate him or her into the practice. Institute a mentoring program, where seasoned associates provide assistance to new hires. It is also helpful to start the employment relationship with a conversation about the associate's own professional goals and how they mesh with the overall objectives of the firm. This cultivates a feeling of belonging and loyalty for long term employment.

Don't let these goals fly out of the window once the first few months of employment pass. Continuously provide incentives for new associate performance and maintain an environment that celebrates their strengths, while helping them manage their weaknesses. This sends a message that the firm is invested in the success of the associates and ensures them that they are not simply seen as a conduit for billable hours.

### **Don't hide your associates**

Client contact can also prove useful for retention. Associates want to feel like their efforts matter and a great way to foster this feeling is to facilitate contact between them and firm clients. Often time, partners are the only firm members who talk with clients directly. Encourage them to include an associate every once in a while. Not only does it add to the associate's job satisfaction, but it also comforts the client to see who is all working on their matter.

Don't take your associates for granted. Take the time and effort to find the best candidates and promote growth within the firm, or else you may find your best associates working for your competition across town.