

RECRUITING LAW FIRM MANAGEMENT AND STAFF:

Criteria Shifts as Market Surges

By Jeanette Derby

As advancements in technology and increased globalization force accelerated change, law firms are reevaluating and restructuring their internal processes and operations at a rapid pace. This dynamic has a tremendous effect on legal professionals as firms amend their traditional roles for “new and improved” versions of support staff. This new legal landscape is also altering how buyers of legal services utilize attorneys under alternative fee arrangements. Yet, with all of these changes, succession planning for executive leadership remains elusive as impending retirements and the reinvention of administrative management roles take hold.

Historically, law firm executives gained their management status as a result of hard work and dedication, earning a steady upward progression in title, responsibility and pay within the firm. Today, the paradigms for management structures are shifting and shaping new talent criteria. As law firms began to adopt corporate management structures to include C-levels within headquarter offices, these upper management decision-makers were becoming strikingly influential, especially in the recruiting of other management professionals. It is no longer uncommon for firms to strategically seek top-level management candidates without prior legal experience. In many cases, advanced degrees, not law firm experience, are the absolute requirement. In addition, many high-level management functions in branch offices are being eliminated or restructured to mid-level management in an effort to decrease the overall responsibility and autonomy of the branch office.

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To further re-shape the long-standing archetype, many law firms have reassigned all of their recruitment functions to a centralized location -- most typically to the HQ. While there is practicality associated with consolidation, the centralization (and systematization) of recruiting removes the personal feel for the candidates and, with it, the value-added services offered by local, market-specific agencies who understand current salaries, candidate supply, and hiring trends. Adding to the inherent challenges of remote recruiting, the employment market in many regions has rebounded significantly. As a result, swift processing of candidates and intense relationship nurturing to identify and entice top talent is the name of the game. Firms interested in securing the best candidates should focus efforts on building relationships with local recruiters.

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As organizations move toward hiring initiatives focused on competencies versus traditional work history, veteran industry recruiters possess a unique vantage point and insight into the overall streamlining of legal roles and, most especially, with regard to upper management. With law firm executive roles transitioning, it is a critical time to examine short and long-term needs and recognize that management shifts can greatly impact culture and reputation – notably in the areas of employee engagement, morale and talent attraction. Firms striving to ensure superior effectiveness and organizational stability should embrace all resources available in order to attract, recruit and retain thriving professionals in this extremely competitive market.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeanette Derby has specialized in legal staffing for over 3 decades and is a distinguished business leader in the Greater Washington, DC Area. While responsible for five successful start-up ventures, Jeanette has dedicated her career to finding successful connections between job seekers and hiring managers! **Find her on LinkedIn:** [Jeanette Derby](#)

