



STRATEGIES FOR LATERAL ASSOCIATE RECRUITING

By Alexandra Gharghoury and Amanda Ryan

As another year of intense lateral associate recruiting is in full swing, we know we need to think beyond our pre-pandemic recruiting strategies to be successful in the market and hire talent for our teams in need. While not exhaustive, we have begun to examine what is (still) driving the market, how best to utilize external recruiters and search firms, and “outside of the box” strategies that might just get a candidate over the line and into your associate ranks.

Maybe this is what people mean when they describe the “new normal,” but legal recruiters are still healing from the market whiplash that began with slowed down and paused hiring in early 2020. Now, when we are trying to keep up with our own needs or talk with our peers, it seems we have all never been busier. Part of the drive is playing catch-up from slowed hiring in an expected market downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only are we now playing catch-up, but

the market is soaring and the high demand for legal work continues to grow — we need to hire on top of hiring! Finally, as if that was not enough, legal employers have not been immune to the “Great Resignation.” In any given year, it is typical for more associates to leave than join an employer, but those numbers have doubled in 2020 and 2021 while client work is on the upswing.

So, what can we do to try to keep pace with needs? Change is tough, so why fix something that isn’t broken? Our recruiting methods are not broken, but the wheels are squeaking. This is a candidate’s market, and we need to think outside of the box to stay competitive by re-examining existing strategies and exploring how to keep them relevant in the shift to hybrid and remote work environments.

Strategy 1: **Examining Money**

We would be remiss if this wasn’t first, although probably the most “in the box” method. Unfortunately, money talks. Of course, money alone won’t solve your recruiting challenges, but you need to understand where your compensation levels fall within

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the market that you are competing in. For better or worse, candidates track every bonus and salary hike announcement and rumor. Even if you are not at the very top of the market with your compensation, you need to remain competitive with the peer firms among which you are competing for talent.

Strategy 2: **Selling Beyond Money**

And of course, you can offer more than money. Can you offer partnership or in-house opportunities that would make your firm stand out? Do you have remote flexibility? What perks stand out that you can offer candidates? Firms are investing in candidates and current lawyers in many ways – the pandemic has only made this aspect of firm life more innovative. Mental health is more of a focus now than it has ever been – and candidates like to see a firm focus on their well-being.

Strategy 3: **Increasing the Candidate Pool**

Can you hire lawyers from non-traditional roles? Are your teams open to training associates looking to retool? Does the candidate need to live in the geographic area where the

office is located? Are you looking at lawyers outside of the U.S. who are looking to move?

Strategy 4: **Moving Quickly**

Speed is your friend, and in this market, it is a distinct advantage to be able to move quickly. Both parties are motivated, and virtual interviewing has afforded the ability to quicken the pace of processes. Can you shorten the offer process and set up “sell” meetings after the offer is extended? Additionally, you can expand your interviewers beyond a particular office for those who might be relevant to the role and stronger at recruiting candidates.

Strategy 5: **Communicating Clearly**

It’s important to have a plan. Once you’ve made the offer, don’t go silent! Ask upper management and more senior attorneys to reach out. That time spent is well worth their hourly rate. Set up additional meetings with associates, even in person if feasible – but make sure they’re engaged! Enthusiasm, or lack thereof, does not go unnoticed.

Strategy 6: **Listening to Your Current Associates and Candidates**

What do your associates need? Set up forums

to hear them out. While we may not be able to answer all their questions, we don’t know anything if they don’t tell us. What do your candidates need? Be flexible in the offer process. Burnout is real – let them take time off in between jobs (even when we needed them to start yesterday).

There will always be collaboration with external recruiters and search firms, but it’s important to make sure the relationships and work are best utilized for both parties. Building the relationship is the fundamental first step, but don’t give every search to the same person. Do you work with a recruiter who knows your geographic market well? Or one who specializes in a certain practice group or industry sector? Set up meetings with a partner or the hiring director to talk through the nitty gritty. If you have access to candidate databases, running searches and pulling together targeted lists can help the recruiter go to market on your behalf.

We are not reinventing the wheel with these strategies. In fact, we’re sure you and your teams are already using them. But we do hope this may spark another method and provide context through the market madness.

For more information, we highly recommend watching the “[Lateral Recruiting Market Update](#),” a webinar from October 2021.

Michelle Le Biavant and Wanda Woods spoke with recruiters to get their take on the market and how best we can manage this time. Michelle and Wanda hosted the webinar as Co-Vice Chairs of the Recruiting Section’s Lateral Hiring Work Group. +

This article was submitted on behalf of the Recruiting Section.



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