

Are Lawyers happy? If not, what can you do to change that?

By Gary Mitchell; Managing Director, GEM Communications Inc.

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It may come as a surprise to some, but there are a lot of unhappy lawyers out there. Why? Well there are a number of reasons, but most of them can be summed up by acknowledging that this new generation of lawyers have different needs.

While this article does not intend to provide all the answers, these suggestions come from working one-to-one with lawyers from 1st year call right up to 30 year veterans. Here are a few good places to start.

It starts with recruitment. Set real expectations. In that dance that occurs between your firm and students or associates or even lateral partners, paint a clear picture of what the culture is, that way you are more likely to attract the type of person who will be attracted to that culture and stay. No surprises!

From day one, support the growth and learning of your team and don't let them fend for themselves. As expectations change, so must the support you provide to your team. Simply demanding a new way of doing things will not be met with much enthusiasm. For instance if you are asking your lawyers to develop business of their own, then give them the adequate training in order to become effective at it. The cost of providing this form of support is not only grossly over shadowed by the business they bring in, it doesn't even begin to compare to the tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars a firm loses when they lose a qualified lawyer.

Help the lawyer create a practice that interests them. It may seem so simple yet it seems that it is rarely done. The work gets pushed down and in the very early years this makes sense. But as you are developing your associates, make sure they are in a practice area that they are suited for and enjoy. I had one client that was ready to pack it in after five years. He decided to give up his litigation

practice and start over as a solicitor. He is now working in an area he loves and serving clients he likes. He is happy, bringing in tons of new work and has turned his career around.

Identify leaders and groom them to take on more mentorship and associate development. Putting your highest earning lawyers into leadership roles because they have been great lawyers doesn't necessarily translate to good leadership. Either give them the leadership training, or identify only naturally talented leaders. Your young associates will be a lot more motivated and happy to work with real leaders.

Create more flexibility in your work environment. The needs of lawyers are changing. Firms that remain flexible to these changing needs will be better positioned in this ever increasing competitive battle for talent. Just as the corporate world has had to move to **create flexible working conditions, like it or not, so too must the legal industry-and fast!** I offer three simple ideas that could go along way: allowing people to work from home, have consultants who get paid for the work they do each month, and providing day care at the firm.

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