

BUSINESS & CAREERS

"Medieval" lockstep associate pay rethought

Lockstep associate compensation is dead. The deepening recession has law firms nixing the "medieval" pay structure, according to *Bloomberg News*. "One of the best things firms are doing is breaking the ridiculous lockstep structure of associate compensation," Joel Henning, a law firm consultant at Hildebrandt International Inc. told the news service. Many big firms, including Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, Shearman & Sterling LLP and WolfBlock LLP, are cutting salaries, rewarding associates based on merit, not seniority, "and generally putting an end to decades of associate entitlement," notes *Bloomberg*.



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Get the most out of your marketing team

Are you using your marketing department to its best advantage? Can you afford not to? More than ever you need to prove to your clients that you are relevant. A veteran law firm marketing director and an experienced client development coach sat down to consider the reasons why lawyers are not consulting with their marketing teams as well as they should. They offer the following advice to lawyers.

It's been said that everybody complains about the weather, but nobody does anything about it. In a way, the same holds true for legal marketing. It's common for lawyers to lament the challenges they have working with their marketing teams, and marketers often express frustration about the difficulty of meeting lawyer expectations. Rarely do the two sides talk openly and honestly about the obstacles that stand in the way of a closer-to-perfect rapport.

Meeting in the middle between our respective vantage points, we agreed that lawyers usually don't use their marketing department to its best advantage for one of two reasons: 1) they don't know what the marketing department can or should do for them; or 2) they don't trust the marketing department to do a good job or add any value. The good news? We also agreed that the remedy for this can be fairly simple.

Try these six tips to turn a firm resource into your own secret weapon.

1. Come to the marketing department with problems, not solutions

As a lawyer, you're trained to find solutions to problems on your own; but if you only approach your marketing department for tactical support once decisions have already been made, you're missing out on valuable experience, perspective and suggestions that could contribute to a superior outcome. Think of your marketing staff as collaborators.



CATHERINE MITCHELL



KELLI WIGHT



ALLISON WOLF

“If you only approach your marketing department... once decisions have already been made, you're missing out...”

2. Build proactive lines of communication with your marketing staff and encourage them to do the same

The more the marketing team knows about you and your business development objectives, the more often they'll approach you when appropriate opportunities arise. At the outset it may seem like a shot in the dark, but if you take a little time to explain your practice development goals and make it clear that you are receptive to hearing about new ideas, you may be surprised at the results. They really do want to help you.

3. Be willing to give up historical sacred cow projects in lieu of zero-based planning

Sometimes even the best initiatives have run their course and need

to be retired or retooled. Yes, if it ain't broke you shouldn't fix it, but this isn't about doing things better, it's about doing better things. And now more than ever, it's about doing better things first, before your competition does. These times call for strategies that get you in front of your key clients and prospects for reasons they value. Just ensure you're not discounting a new idea because you've always done it the other way.

4. Be respectful of deadlines and commitments

Anyone who has worked in a law firm marketing department for more than two weeks knows that lawyers can and will miss deadlines. However, not only does on-time delivery help to improve the quality of the final product but it also buys the goodwill and confidence of everyone outside of the firm who may be involved in the project (including important referral sources and the media). So if you really don't have to be late, don't procrastinate. And if you really do have to be late, keep everyone informed.

5. Consider the bang for the buck

It's great when several lawyers in the firm are pursuing a common goal. It's even better when they are willing to talk to one another and work together in a coordinated way. Anything you can do to facilitate teamwork helps the marketing department to direct more effort toward meaningful contribution and less effort toward the proverbial act of "herding cats."

6. Work with the members of the marketing team that you like the most

If you don't have responsibility for hiring the marketing staff at your firm, chances are there are some members of the department that you

like better than others. It's OK to request to liaise most closely with those marketers whose personality and style fit best with yours. Think of your favourite marketer as a "project manager" who can tap into the other marketing department resources on your behalf.

7. Know when to divide and conquer

You wouldn't advise your clients to handle their own legal matters, so why do you think you have to handle all your own marketing initiatives? Leverage the expertise of the experts. That's why you hired them. And that's why they chose to work at your firm.

Why bother?

If you put a little effort into developing your relationship with your marketing team, you may find some unexpected rewards, like the chance to:

- Use your non-billable time more strategically. The best way to grow your practice is to spend more of your non-billable time in front of clients, prospects, referral sources and other key contacts and less of your non-billable time on micro-managing back-office functions.

- Improve your bottom line. Taking a fresh look at your approach to marketing and business development and injecting some new ideas into the process could lead to unexpected revenue generation opportunities.

OK, so there still isn't anything you can do about the weather. But the good news is that there is a lot you can do to recharge your relationship with your marketing resources and get them working for you. Now is the time. ■

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Now is time to reach out to your clients



ALLISON WOLF

As we move deeper into 2009, one thing I know for sure is that we are all facing a period of uncertainty. The environment in which we live and work has changed. To succeed we must figure out how to make the most from this changed environment and discover how we can create value for our clients, our organizations and ourselves.

For lawyers who value the role of trusted advisor you now have the opportunity before you to reach out to your clients and demonstrate your commitment to them. Take a lesson from the trusted advisors of old: the family doctors. Schedule some time for house calls. Visit your clients in their place of business. Make sure your clients know that the visit is off the clock. Learn about their goals and strategies for the year ahead.

After listening to your clients, take some time to reflect on how you can help. You may have the advice they need to keep their deals from collapsing. It may be resolving conflicts over broken contracts. It might be restructuring their business. Focus on what you do best and find the opportunities to help clients in this new economic environment.

A word of caution: Be careful not to take on work that you are not going to excel at. When times are tough it can be tempting to take on any piece of work that comes through the door. This is dangerous. See *Advisor* Page 22

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