

Business of Law

The coach: Law firm HR and the 'Great Resignation' | Gary Mitchell

By **Gary Mitchell**

Gary Mitchell

(April 5, 2022, 9:16 AM EDT) -- HR is being turned upside down as one of the outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic. People were initially forced to work from home. And over the past two years, they have learned to embrace it. They want more time with their children. They are choosing to work less and live more. Have more quality of life. More work-life balance. People are retiring sooner.

At any given point in our history, when we have gone through such a massive upheaval, event or catastrophe, it has caused massive disruption. This disruption, while challenging and uncomfortable, almost always produces innovation, a new way of thinking, progress and movement forward. People tend to reflect on their lives, on their priorities, on their professional paths. Is this such a bad thing?

Law firms are not immune from this phenomenon. You are going to have to adapt your hiring and retention approaches or face a long-term shortage of talent in serving your clients.

It's time to come out of the dark ages. Full disclosure, I am an optimist. As a business coach, I have no choice. I see a challenge and I immediately look for opportunities. And the pandemic, with all of its challenges, has also produced many opportunities.

The first opportunity I would like to point out, and we have seen this come to fruition over the past 25 months, is that firms that adapt to the new reality of the workforce have such an amazing opportunity to capture a larger segment of the legal talent pool and shut their competitors out. This will be a huge differentiator moving forward. For what is a law firm without top-shelf talent?

So much complaining goes on about this current generation. It is what it is. Learn to adapt or become irrelevant. Get over it! It starts with becoming more flexible in your hiring practices.

With more people working virtually from home, your ability to hire from a larger geographical radius is now available. So, your talent pool is expanded, not depleted. And, with more people working from home, you can cut some of your overhead costs by shrinking your bricks-and-mortar space. And, as an added bonus, these same people have already worked out the kinks associated with working from home, at no cost to your firm.

Are you missing out on a vast pool of talent because you are still following archaic HR practices? Is "face time" at the office that important? Shouldn't it be about the level of talent, the quality of the work product, productivity, client satisfaction, and let us not forget profitability? Does it really matter where the work gets done?

Over the past 25 months, I have witnessed first-hand in many of my clients, the early stages of working from home. Working through the kinks. Creating new systems. Improving self-discipline. In effect, COVID-19 has been an HR partner in training the workforce on how to adapt and thrive when working from home. Did firms invest in this training? No. Did the sky fall? No. Did firms disintegrate? No.

Aside from the obvious benefits of having happier, healthier lawyers and staff, both physically and mentally, we have seen productivity increase. More compassion in the workforce.

Would law firms have ever allowed lawyers and staff to work from home, had it not been for COVID-19? I highly doubt it. This is an example of where a negative influence could have a positive outcome, that is if you chose it to be. Welcome to the 21st-century legal industry.

The Great Resignation is a natural occurrence coming out of the pandemic. Should we be surprised? Priorities change. Goals change. Some will be left behind, while others will flourish. Those left behind will cling to old ways, archaic ways that no longer serve the business (firm), the talent, or the clients. Those that flourish will adapt, innovate, and create new approaches and strategies to not only survive this upheaval but thrive and come out stronger.

I for one see this movement as an infusion of fresh ideas, new ways of thinking and new ways of providing extraordinary service to your clients. It's akin to the legal industry being hit by a bolt of lightning. This has been a long time coming.

Gary Mitchell is a business coach to lawyers, published author and speaker. After years in development, he has recently released the Practice Builder App for Lawyers. He can be reached at 604-669-5235, and gary@ontraccoach.com.

Interested in writing for us? To learn more about how you can add your voice to The Lawyer's Daily, contact Analysis Editor Richard Skinulis at Richard.Skinulis@lexisnexis.ca or call 437- 828-6772.

© 2022, The Lawyer's Daily. All rights reserved.