



legal management

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL ADMINISTRATORS

Constructing a Winning Law Firm Merger or Acquisition

Navigating DEIA Pushback

The Power of Servant
Leadership in Legal



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Embracing Servant Leadership: A New Year's Resolution

ALA is positioned to embrace and model servant leadership in ways that will bond us closer together and attract others to want to join us.

BY ERYN CARTER, CAE



**“
Let’s resolve to lead
with service, prioritize
the success of others
and champion the
principles of servant
leadership in all that
we do.”**

As we step into a new year, it’s natural to reflect on where we’ve been and chart a course for where we’re going. For ALA and the members we serve, the new year offers a valuable opportunity to reaffirm our core values and set meaningful goals. One principle stands out as both timeless and particularly meaningful: servant leadership.

Servant leadership is about prioritizing the needs of others and empowering those around us to grow, thrive and succeed. We have all likely experienced or perhaps were taught to value and embody a leadership style that focuses on asserting authority and achieving personal or organizational dominance. In contrast, servant leadership turns the paradigm upside down by emphasizing collaboration, empathy and the well-being of the entire community. This approach challenges us to lead not by command but by example, fostering trust and cultivating environments where everyone can excel.

At ALA, we are a community dedicated to collaboration, education and shared success — we are positioned to embrace and model this approach in ways that will bond us closer together and attract others to want to join us.

But what does servant leadership look like in practice? How can ALA, as an organization, resolve to lead with service in the year ahead? I propose a few guiding principles as part of a shared New Year's resolution:

1. Be Stewards of the Mission

As members and staff of ALA, we share a responsibility to uphold and advance our mission. Servant leadership reminds us that our actions should always align with our vision and purpose: to create excellence, drive innovation and empower leaders in law. To support and elevate the professionals we serve and the profession we are a part of this year, let's ensure that every initiative, every decision and every interaction reflects our commitment to this shared vision.

2. Cultivate Community

Servant leadership is about relationships – recognizing how we are connected and working to build a community where everyone feels valued and supported. As we look ahead, we'll strive to strengthen the bonds within ALA by fostering a culture of belonging, respect and mutual support; we can create a space where everyone can thrive.

For instance, in 2025, we will continue highlighting conversations and facilitate bringing members together through our Online Community. Members can also expect to see the newly reimagined shared interest groups (SIGs) and new virtual and in-person events designed to address the most critical issues for legal administrators. Strategies like these not only build connection but provide opportunities for members to feel integral to the community.

3. Listen to Understand

Effective servant leaders are great listeners. This goes beyond hearing words; it involves seeking to understand the experiences, challenges and aspirations of others. In ALA, this means engaging more deeply with our members, soliciting feedback about their needs, and fostering open dialogue among our staff and Board. By genuinely listening to members, we hope to demonstrate respect and build on the foundation of taking meaningful action.

ALA's new volunteer groups that launch in 2025 will be led by a dynamic group of volunteer leaders who will be using

member input to enhance how they engage with ALA and discover new ways their membership works for them.

4. Empower Others

One of the most rewarding aspects of leadership is witnessing the success of others. This year, we commit to identifying and nurturing talent within our community. Whether it's mentoring a colleague through the Member Ambassador Program, leaning into our diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility strategic focus area by ensuring that all events not just meet but exceed accessibility standards, or enhancing the Legal Management Talk podcast with our new "Meeting the Moment" series, ALA has the power to make a lasting impact to help members achieve their goals.

5. Lead with Humility

Servant leadership requires humility – a willingness to celebrate and share successes, admit mistakes and prioritize what is best for ALA. Humility strengthens team morale and reinforces a culture of mutual respect and trust. In practice, this means embracing collaboration and recognizing that leadership fosters an environment where every voice matters.

New Year's resolutions often focus on personal improvement, but this year, my hope is to help make ours about collective growth. Let's resolve to lead with service, prioritize the success of others and champion the principles of servant leadership in all that we do. By doing so, we can not only strengthen ALA but also inspire greater collaboration among members and enhance the professional development opportunities available to all – throughout our profession and the legal industry.

Together, we can make 2025 a year of service, empowerment and shared success. Here's to embracing the spirit of leadership and making a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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REWARDS

Winning the Talent Race: Law Firm Hiring Strategies for 2025

Outsourcing work to remote associates can help your firm's bottom line and with hiring struggles.

BY KRISTIN TYLER



“A remote associate often allows you to connect with a seasoned lawyer who can do the legal work without training or hand-holding. Your law office — and your client — can benefit from the attorney’s years of experience and get them up and running fast.”

Between advances in technology, shifting client expectations and an increasingly competitive job market for associates, securing the right talent in 2025 will require law firms to rethink traditional approaches.

Midsized law firms that only implement the traditional hiring methods are having a hard time finding talented associates. The traditional way of hiring takes forever and is getting more expensive every year.

The good news is that outsourcing work to remote associates has become mainstream. Firms all across the United States are finding success with a hybrid hiring approach that includes adding remote associates to their established team of in-office full-time associates.

Here are five advantages to consider as you evaluate outsourcing as part of your 2025 associate hiring strategy.

No. 1: Flexible Solutions

When you're managing the associate talent pool for your firm, it's natural that the firm's need for associates is going to vary at different points in time. Having the ability to quickly staff up or down with associates can be crucial to managing your capital and minimizing overhead.

That's why any size firm can benefit from adopting a multipronged approach to staffing their team with associates. Of course, your firm may need a core group of full-time, in-office associates to support the firm's partners' workloads. But you can supplement the core team with the flexibility of remote associates.

Working with a contract lawyer (aka remote associate) via outsourcing can be a smart staffing solution for a lot of reasons. First, outsourced remote attorneys don't have overhead costs tied to them. There are no benefits, insurance, office space, equipment or salaries to commit to when hiring a contract lawyer, and the contract lawyer will only work when you need them to.

Additionally, a remote associate often allows you to connect with a seasoned lawyer who can do the legal work without training or hand-holding. Your law office — and your client — can benefit from the attorney's years of experience and get them up and running fast.

The beauty of outsourcing is that you don't have to worry about the natural fluctuations in your work volume. If the demands of the firm aren't extremely heavy, don't send any work to the freelancer(s). If you are slammed and pressed to meet certain deadlines, you can connect with multiple remote attorneys to get the immediate help you need.

No. 2: Time Is Money

Let's face it: Traditional law firm hiring is slow. Most midsize firms rely on the traditional law firm hiring strategy to bring on a full-time associate — either a lateral hire or a first year. The process can be long and cumbersome, taking many months to find and hire the right associate.

A lateral hire can take 3 to 12 months because it depends on finding the right candidate at the right time. Perhaps you find an excellent candidate, but they are unable or unwilling to leave their current firm for a number of months due to an anticipated bonus or upcoming trial.



The necessity to be discrete with this process adds to the time it takes to recruit a lateral associate.

First year associates are another common law firm hiring option. The majority of those entry level hires happen in the late summer months after law school graduation and the bar exam. Many firms need to hire now rather than spending months going through the recruiting process and waiting for a new attorney to pass the bar exam.

The amount of time and effort it takes to hire, in and of itself, is compelling enough of a reason why it is time for a fresh look at the law firm business model. Attorneys need a way to hire faster, but time is not the only challenge — the cost of a new full-time associate is just as challenging.

No. 3: Flexible, Accessible Talent

Attorneys with years of experience and deep expertise are choosing to leave the traditional law firm associate roles and instead chart a career as full-time professional contract attorneys or remote associates.

A significant reason is that the pandemic profoundly changed the way lawyers and law firms work. The *Where Does the Legal Profession Go from Here?* survey commissioned by the American Bar Association found that remote options are especially important to young lawyers, 44% of whom said they would leave their jobs for a greater ability to work remotely.

By considering remote associates, law firms can tap into a national or even global talent pool. This approach not only increases the chances of finding the right candidate but can also be more cost-effective, fast and flexible.

No. 4: Build a Diverse Team

Having a team of attorneys from a variety of backgrounds can be beneficial both to the firm and to clients because when you bring together a group of smart people, they learn about each other's experiences and share knowledge.

But a lack of diversity is a challenge for many law firms and is even more pronounced among midsize law firms and law firms in more rural areas. These firms must actively seek out diverse candidates and provide opportunities for advancement into leadership and decision-making positions.

If your firm is lacking in diversity, support local, regional and national ethnic bar associations by sponsoring some of their events – they could be great avenues for recruiting diverse talent. Working with remote associates can also be a powerful way to find and integrate diverse attorneys into your law firm. Recruiting from a remote talent pool opens you up to a much bigger and more diverse array of candidates to join your team.

No. 5: Numbers and Sense

The economics of working with remote associates is similar to the in-office associate business model but with much lower overhead. Remote associates can be hired for many months or many years and are paid as 1099 contractors. This allows you to flexibly adjust to the needs of your team without incurring additional overhead. The speed and flexibility of remote associates are fantastic and so are the economics.

Here's an example to illustrate the potential return on investment.

Let's say your firm needs to hire a 3- to 5-year associate to supplement the workflow of one of your teams. The department chair estimates they could use around 100 hours of help from a remote associate each month. You find a talented candidate and agree to pay them \$110 per hour. Based on their experience and qualifications (and your market) you determine you can bill their work to your clients at \$350 per hour:

- ✔ Paying hourly associate: \$110/hour
- ✔ Reasonable market rate: \$350/hour
- ✔ \$350 per hour x 100 hours of work billed to client: \$35,000
- ✔ \$110 per hour x 100 hours paid to associate: -\$11,000
- ✔ **Monthly profit to firm, no overhead: \$35,000-\$11,000 = \$24,000**



Maybe an extra \$24,000 in one month is not earth shattering to your bottom line, but let's consider if you kept that same remote associate on the team for a year. That would produce \$288,000 in additional revenue.

SMART HIRING SOLUTIONS

Midsize law firms can face a lot of challenges when it comes to hiring top talent. However, with the right approach, it's possible to hire the best talent and create a strong competitive edge in the legal industry. If your firm has ambitious growth goals for 2025, then winning the talent race will be key. A savvy way to get the flexible talent you need with little or no overhead is to include remote associates as part of your overall hiring strategy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Creating and Capturing Value Through Service Offering Design: 3 Quick Interventions

The consequences of continuous mismatch between the lawyer and client engagements often result in professional demotivation, lower service quality, and — as a result — lower firm profitability.

BY SERGEI N. FREIMAN



“**Service offering design (SOD) implies creation, revision and fine-tuning of both new and existing offerings and service lines.**”

Service innovation, value-based pricing and hourly rate abolition are all hot topics in the legal profession. While in theory these concepts sound great, implementation is typically the biggest stumbling block.

The benefits are often uncertain, the process unfamiliar and everything just calls for major changes in routine business operations — something many legal professionals aren't too excited about. Fortunately, there is a way to circumvent all uncertainty associated with radical change and manage value creation and capture with available resources and tried-and-true services.

Service offering design (SOD) implies creation, revision and fine-tuning of both new and existing offerings and service lines. In this article, we'll review several straightforward ways that will enable your firm to improve its services. To ensure a proper setup, first we have to briefly address two topics: client motivations and buyer types.

PRIMARY BUYER TYPES AND MOTIVATIONS

First and foremost, we ought to acknowledge the existence of different buyer types. Many sales and business development professionals often have extensive experience with different client behaviors. However, not every lawyer is aware of buyer typology, which is based on distinct behavioral patterns.

Derived from Thomas Nagle and Reed Holden's works – arguably – there are four primary buyer types in B2B negotiations: 1) price buyers, 2) value buyers, 3) convenience buyers and 4) relationship buyers. (I think there could even be eight distinct buyer types, but, for the purposes of this article, four primary categories will suffice.)

Second, one of the underlying reasons for idiosyncratic buyer behavior rests with motivations. According to psychology literature, human motivations prime behavior, set up perceptual frames and participate in goal setting. Hence, during sales negotiations, client behavior will be driven by their motivations and goals.

Without getting into the weeds of psychological needs, motivations and goal facilitators, we should understand that each buyer type assigns disproportionate value to different aspects of service provision. From a client's perspective, that which facilitates movement toward a worthy goal is valuable – everything else is irrelevant. Therefore, some components of your current service offerings will be perceived as central to one buyer type while mostly tangential to another buyer.

ADJUSTING VALUE ACTIVITIES AND VALUE ELEMENTS

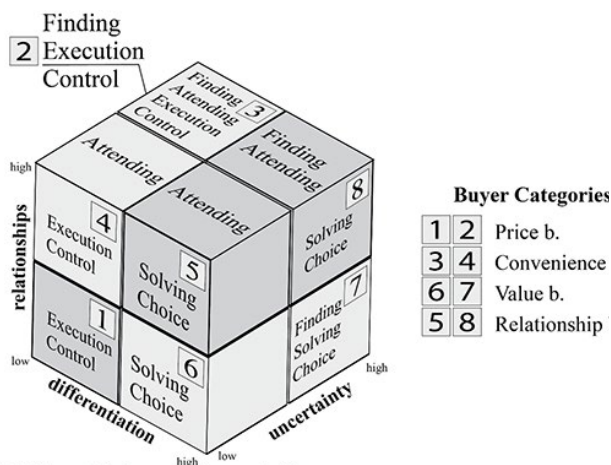


FIGURE 1. Map of Value creation activities

Two professors at the Norwegian School of Management introduced the concept of a value shop. With regard to professional service firms, my analysis suggests the following six value activities to be key: 1) problem-finding and acquisition, 2) attending, 3) problem-solving, 4) choice, 5) execution, and 6) control and evaluation. Figure 1 exhibits mapping of value activities to primary buyer categories.

Note that all six value activities may be important to the client in principle. However, if necessary, and the fees have to go down, value activities pertinent to their respective octants are typically the ones to be altered or dispensed with last.

Consider a typical price buyer (octants 1 and 2 in the figure) that arrives self-prescribed. They know exactly what they want from their law firm, how the services ought to be provided, who should be involved, when, why and how the process should unfold. Such behavior often manifests during repeat, low-complexity engagements, especially when buyers themselves have (or have unrestricted access to) expertise, connections, insight, etc. In such a scenario, this buyer couldn't care less for any value activities other than Execution and Control (octant 1). The finding value activity is worthless for self-prescribed buyers, too.

Even though this may be a standard procedure at your firm, it makes no sense to provide the other four value activities free of charge for this client. The perceived value will be negligible, while their provision is going to make your firm less profitable – not to mention professionals' frustrations.

Adjustment of value activities is the first rapid way of improving value creation and capture at your firm. An additional way to enhance your service offerings rests with value elements. A well-known consulting firm, Bain & Company, published a list of 40 elements of value. Juxtaposing these value elements with the current components of your offerings may prove beneficial.

Consider a client that positively responds to services that are provided in a manner that supports, protects, connects, relates, includes other people and helps reach consensus – a typical convenience buyer (octants 3 and 4). The following value elements (per Bain's value pyramid) are likely to make your offering more valuable to this client: responsiveness, commitment, cultural fit and reputational assurance.

In addition, the most desirable value activities for the convenience buyer are most likely to be attending, execution and control — perhaps, some finding as well. Problem-solving (generating and evaluating alternative solutions) and choice (choosing the best-fit solution given the context) can be removed or downplayed first if necessary.

Obviously, some value elements and value activities may not make sense in the context of particular offerings. However, knowing what is valuable in principle allows partners and business developers to adjust the service offering on the go during client pitches. The details must be worked out in advance, of course.

SELECTING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

The last quick intervention rests with matching lawyers with buyer types and type of work. It goes without saying that a lawyer must be competent. However, apart from technical expertise, there are also soft skills to consider. Hence, it's worth knowing that every professional has natural strengths, personal preferences, professional proclivities and personality traits.

The overall quality of the service provision hinges on the professional's technical ability: "I can do it;" willingness to do it well: "I really want to do it;" and commitment: "I will commit myself to doing it." Because clients typically aren't great at evaluating the technical quality of the work — from the client's perspective — the latter two are essential. Therefore, personality assessments may be of significant help in illuminating the willingness and commitment requirements.

For example, because motivations shape our perceptual frames, a lawyer who really enjoys new ideas, strategic thinking, and dynamic, flexible environments might find themselves at odds with a typical price buyer. A professional who prefers consistency, stability and discipline might be a better fit for such a client.

Each individual has a unique combination of different personality traits, preferences and natural strengths. While it is possible to fit some square pegs into some round holes, natural fitness requires less effort. The consequences of continuous mismatch between the lawyer and client engagements often result in professional demotivation, lower service quality and — as a result — lower profitability of the firm.

GOING FORWARD

There are three quick interventions through SOD that may improve your firm's performance. First, identify professionals who can, want and will commit themselves to doing the work well because of their personality traits, interests and natural strengths.

Second, assess which buyer types your firm has most/least success with. Identify which value activities (as outlined in Figure 1) you may wish to add/remove or reduce/amplify for particular clients. Make sure you have buy-in from respective attorneys and lawyers on these changes as well.

Finally, explore value elements to identify additional opportunities to add/cull offering components for certain buyer types. For example, if you have a case management software with a fancy client dashboard that has all sorts of enhancements to it, offer your clients access. Price buyers in particular will be ecstatic about the ability to track progress — even for a fee.

The bottom line is straightforward: Charge clients for that which they perceive as valuable and prune activities and components that they deem irrelevant. To figure out what is recognized as precious, all we have to do is understand how our clients see the world. Sometimes, this is easier than it seems — especially for lawyers who already wear spectacles with the same perceptual lenses as clients.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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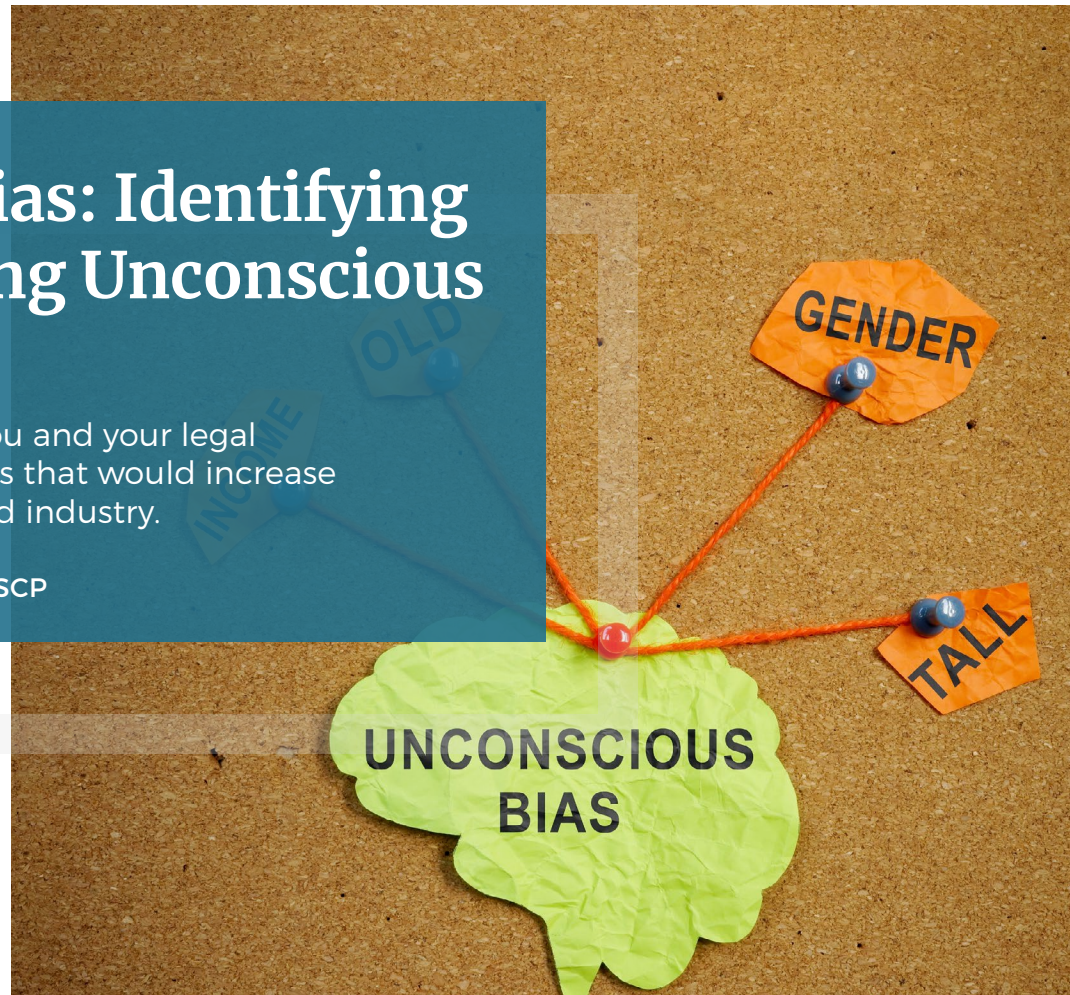
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Battling the Bias: Identifying and Eliminating Unconscious Biases

Unconscious bias can rob you and your legal organization of contributions that would increase your success in your field and industry.

BY CHRISTINE HASHEMI, SHRM-SCP



“
How will such unconscious biases affect you and your organization? These biases can drive who gets hired, who gets what kind of work, who gets raises and recognition and who gets promoted.”

Unconscious bias, or implicit bias, is a term heard frequently these days. It refers to a negative attitude one is unaware of that affects the way they think and feel about others around them within a specific social group.

The human brain can take in 11 million bits of information every second. But we can only process about 40 to 50 bits of information per second, leading our brains to take unconscious shortcuts for the sake of efficiency. These shortcuts come from biases we aren't even aware we have and that carry inherent unfairness because they are unexamined, unvetted, unrealistic and unreasonable.

How will such unconscious biases affect you and your organization? These biases can drive who gets hired, who gets what kind of work, who gets raises and recognition and who gets promoted. Unconscious bias can rob you and your firm of contributions that would increase your success in your field and industry. To eliminate these biases, let's identify several of the most common ones and discuss ways to battle the biases.

AFFINITY BIAS

Also known as similarity bias, affinity bias is the tendency to gravitate toward others with whom we share similar backgrounds, interests and experiences. This might include people who went to the same or similar colleges or universities or come from the same city or state. It might include looking more favorably on those with similar-sounding, less “ethnic-sounding” names. This can lead to excluding diverse candidates who could bring new ideas and perspectives to your organization.

Battling Affinity Bias: Consciously note when you find similarities with a candidate or employee. Once identified, make sure you eliminate these attributes as criteria for hiring or receiving an assignment or promotion. Focus instead on qualifications that have everything to do with achieving your goals.

AGE BIAS

Age bias is the negative feeling one might have about someone else based on their age. It tends to affect older people more often than younger people, though it can affect younger generations, too. According to AARP, about two-thirds of workers aged 50 and older believe they may have experienced age discrimination in the past or are more likely to experience it in the future.

Battling Age Bias: Address the possibility of age bias within your organization and teach your employees that assumptions made about workers based on their ages are stereotypes and patently untrue. Point out how older workers with commensurate experience — and younger workers with different perspectives — can bring a variety of benefits to your workforce.

CONFORMITY BIAS

Conformity bias happens when people feel they need to behave like those around them. It often involves succumbing to peer pressure — even unconsciously — to fit in. This bias discourages people from having their own opinions and personal beliefs. When recruiting or working with others perceived as “nonconforming,” it can lower perceptions based on unfair and discriminatory values.

Battling Conformity Bias: When recruiting, have your hiring team write down their opinions of candidates before the team meets to discuss. This prevents individual members from swaying others’ opinions, and the feedback is more honest and valuable. Ensure your employee handbook prohibits workplace bullying and sets up disciplinary measures for those who try to force their opinions on others.



GENDER BIAS

Gender bias occurs when a person is treated differently because of their gender identity or expression. A well-known example of gender bias is labeling an assertive woman as “aggressive” while an assertive man is described as “confident.” Employers who allow gender bias to go unchecked risk losing the engagement of women and non-binary employees, who will bring their talents and skills to more enlightened organizations where they feel safe and valued.

Battling Gender Bias: Create a screening process in recruiting that removes gender-identifying information, such as name and interests. Set diversity hiring goals to ensure your organization holds itself to equitable standards in hiring. Hold your management team accountable to impartial performance management standards in eliminating stereotypical and unbalanced behavioral views.

NAME BIAS

Name bias occurs when an employer tends to prefer people with certain types of names, such as those of Anglo origin. This is one of the most common examples of unconscious bias. Studies have shown that white-sounding names receive significantly more calls for interviews than Black names. One found that Asian last names are 28% less likely to receive a call for an interview than Anglo last names.

Battling Name Bias: As with gender bias, name bias is also easy to combat in recruiting by creating a screening process that removes names and personal information (email, phone number, address) and assigns numbers to resumes and applications. This forces the hiring team to focus on experience and skills that specifically pertain to the requirements of the position.

There are numerous ways in which we can get in our own way when trying to put forth our best efforts toward diversity, equity and inclusion in our organizations. Becoming aware of these biases is the first step. The next crucial step is to create accountability policies and procedures that enable us to see, address and take away the power of our unconscious biases. Battling the bias is key to elevating your organization to its next phase of success.

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The Hidden Wealth in the Workplace: Your People

When it comes to leadership in law firms, leaders must focus on the releasing of human potential.

BY PHIL GELDART



“Working for a great leader can make coming to work more enjoyable, more productive, more satisfying and provide a much greater opportunity to make a significant difference.”

Individuals come to work every day with a desire to do their very best and see their organizations succeed. In a legal organization, this can be particularly important because the work being done can easily touch the lives of so many people in significant ways.

Each of these employees reports organizationally to a leader. While the leadership duties within a law firm may be different from the leadership in corporations, it's nonetheless a role that falls to many and carries a significant responsibility. Beyond simply providing clarity of objectives, assessing performance and focusing on skill improvement, this responsibility should include the releasing of human potential.

Those benefitting financially from the firm's work are clearly looking for that financial value to be optimized, and the clients are looking for the service they pay for and receive to be high value. Given that the firm accomplishes its work through people, optimizing the contribution that each person can make is clearly a significant influencer in the overall productivity and effectiveness of the firm.

If leaders understand that employees can contribute significantly beyond what they are usually asked to do, then they are able to harness that potential to the benefit of both the employee and organization. However, if there's no appreciation for each individual's true capability, employees will become "resources to be managed" rather than individuals to be empowered.

AN OPPORTUNITY

This form of leadership does not need to be overly burdensome; rather, it should be seen as an opportunity to shape and enhance the skills and contributions of others. To do this requires a significant initial investment in leaders to give them the skills they need to capitalize on employees' capabilities.

These skills include the basics such as communication, goal setting and assessment, but also include areas such as:

- » Learning to solicit input and then responding appropriately.
- » Coaching effectively, without being either overbearing or superficial.
- » Clearly defining accountabilities and making available the resources necessary to deliver those accountabilities in new or unfamiliar situations.
- » Demonstrating respect for each individual and the potential they have to make a meaningful difference if given the opportunity to do so.

Complementary to this, organizations should equip the employees to know how to contribute to their fullest. Employees should know:

- » When to speak up
- » What to expect when they do take the initiative
- » How to do so in a way that is practical and productive
- » How to prepare so that their input has the greatest possible impact

When employees are equipped to operate in this fashion, and leaders are equipped to respond appropriately, then the organization is far more likely to realize the full benefit everyone can make.

Most of us have had the opportunity to work for both good and bad leaders. On reflection, we may realize that working for a poor leader typically results in low morale, additional personal stress, less personal productivity and often the desire to look for an alternate place of employment. On the other hand, working for a great leader can make coming to work more enjoyable, more productive, more satisfying and provide a much greater opportunity to make a significant difference.

Clearly, it is of value to all concerned — the firm, its leaders and its employees — to aspire to be a company of great leaders rather than poor ones. Great leaders are those who know how to release the full potential of every employee for the benefit of the firm and are successful in their desire to do so.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Phil Geldart, author of *Leading What Matters Most: A Business Parable on Unlocking Human Potential*, is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Eagles Flight, a company focused on improving individual and team productivity. Prior to founding Eagle's Flight, Geldart was with Nestlé Canada, where he worked for 18 years, the last five of which he served as a member of the executive team in the capacity of Senior Vice President of Human Resources. He is also the author of several previous books, including *In Your Hands: The Behaviors of a World Class Leader*, *Experiential Learning: Changing Behavior to Improve Performance*, and *Lead Yourself Lead Others: Eight Principles of Leadership*.

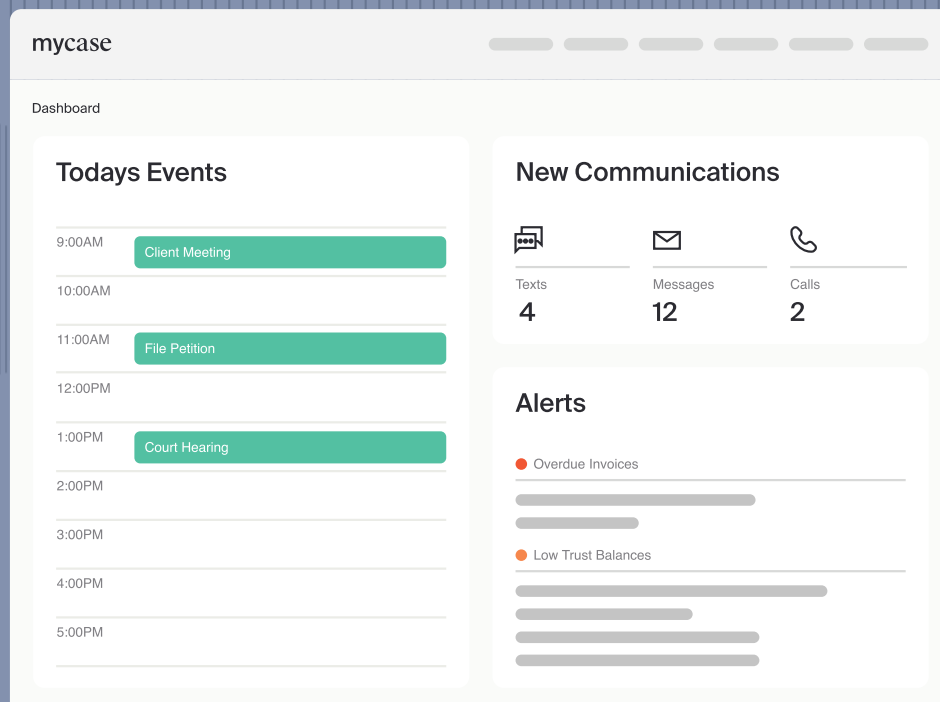
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Building a Mental Health Foundation: Proactive Support for Your Team

In the legal industry, where stress levels are often high and the demands on all staff are intense, the need for mental health support is even more critical.

BY BRIAN SMITH, PHD



“Mental health isn’t something we should think about only during times of crisis. It’s a continuing issue that requires proactive attention.”

One often overlooked aspect of organizational leadership – especially in high-pressure environments like law firms – is the ongoing need for mental health support. Too often, companies wait until employees face significant challenges before addressing mental health when in fact, creating a strong foundation of support ahead of time is crucial.

Mental health isn’t something we should think about only during times of crisis. It’s a continuing issue that requires proactive attention. Waiting for a team member to reach a breaking point can make support feel reactive and, in some cases, insufficient. Whereas building a foundation of mental health support sends a clear message that your legal organization cares about its people – not just in hard times, but all the time. This approach normalizes mental health, reduces stigma and builds engagement across the team.

MENTAL HEALTH AS A CULTURAL PILLAR

In a field like law, where stress levels are often high and the demands on all staff are intense, the need for mental health support is even more critical.

It's essential it becomes part of the culture, not just an emergency response. When mental health support is embedded into daily operations, employees feel comfortable asking for help without fear of being judged.

This begins with leadership making it clear that well-being is a priority. Leaders must actively communicate the resources available, from mental health days to counseling services, and consistently remind the team that these supports exist for everyone, no matter the situation.

One key aspect is making sure your organization complies with regulations like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), both of which protect employees who may need accommodations due to mental health challenges. At the same time, confidentiality must be at the forefront. Employees need to know that any mental health concerns they disclose will be handled with the utmost discretion, in line with privacy protections under laws like the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

By normalizing mental health and providing clear, compliant access to support, organizations create a culture where employees are more likely to seek help early, preventing small issues from becoming major crises.

APPLYING THE S.M.A.R.T. FRAMEWORK TO MENTAL HEALTH

The S.M.A.R.T. framework (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) can apply to more than just business goals — it's also a powerful tool for supporting your team's mental health. Here's how you can use this approach to ensure your mental health initiatives are impactful and sustainable:

- 1. Specific:** Clearly define and communicate the mental health resources available to your team. Whether it's access to therapy, mental health days or mindfulness programs, specificity helps ensure employees know where to turn and what to expect.
- 2. Measurable:** Track engagement with mental health services to understand how effective they are. Measuring usage while maintaining confidentiality helps leaders adjust their approach to better meet team needs.
- 3. Attainable:** Ensure your mental health initiatives are easily accessible to all employees. This includes offering services that fit different work schedules or allowing remote access to support for busy professionals.

- 4. Realistic:** Tailor your mental health programs to the unique realities of your organization. For legal professionals, who may face high levels of stress or burnout, services like coaching, flexible work arrangements or on-demand counseling could be particularly valuable.
- 5. Timely:** Don't wait for a crisis to communicate about mental health. By incorporating mental health support into regular conversations, employees are more likely to use these services before problems escalate.

EMPATHY FIRST: THE HEART OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

One of the most important aspects of providing mental health support is ensuring that it begins with empathy and compassion. In law firms or legal departments, where pressure can mount quickly, leaders should approach employees with care, especially when they disclose personal challenges. These conversations should never feel transactional; they need to be human and supportive.

While empathy is essential, it must be paired with practical solutions. Organizations can help by offering access to mental health services, whether through Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), third-party counselors or wellness programs. These services need to be easily accessible, confidential and promoted regularly.



Another critical factor is providing time and flexibility for employees to deal with personal challenges. If an employee needs time off to manage mental health, organizations should support that need without hesitation. Adjusting workloads or providing temporary flexibility is a practical way to show that the organization prioritizes its people's well-being.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF ENGAGEMENT

A strong mental health foundation builds trust and engagement. When employees know that their mental health matters – both during times of struggle and in day-to-day operations – they feel more connected to their work, their colleagues and their leadership. Open communication and consistent follow-through on mental health promises are key to building this kind of trust.

This engagement goes beyond simply offering services. It's about creating a workplace culture where team members feel comfortable using these resources. By actively promoting mental health programs and ensuring

accessibility, organizations can foster an environment where employees feel supported and valued.

Mental health is not a one-time issue that only arises during tough times. It's an ongoing concern that requires consistent support from leadership. A proactive approach helps reduce stigma, encourages engagement, and ultimately strengthens both individual well-being and organizational success.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brian Smith, PhD, is the co-author with his daughter Mary Griffin of the "I" in Team Series™, including *Individual Influence*, *Positive Influence* and *Responsible Influence*. As the founder of IA Business Advisors and host of the Daily Influence podcast, Smith draws on over 30 years of business consulting experience and his background in organizational psychology to explore the nuances of positive leadership.

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Navigating DEIA Pushback

With progress comes blowback — but learn how firms can maintain and continue to push forward their diversity initiatives.

BY PAULA TSURUTANI



“As legal administrators, we must see ourselves as the gateway, the starting point to a more diverse and inclusive legal profession. ... Take this task seriously and know that your voice matters.”

Although the pace of diversity in law firms has been slow, it has been steady yet not overwhelming. The 2024 American Lawyer’s Diversity Scorecard, which surveyed 208 law firms, reveals that minority attorneys comprised 22.4% in 2023, a modest increase from 21.6% in 2022, and a noticeable increase from 9.7% in 2021.

But amid pushback and recent events — including the U.S. Supreme Court’s affirmative action decision and a new president taking office — have some wondering about the future of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) and how firms can maintain and continue to make progress.

The SCOTUS decision limited higher education institutions from using race or ethnicity as part of their admissions process, restricting the use of affirmative action principles. While the decision generated concern among educational and professional organizations, it did not impact private employers.

“The Supreme Court’s affirmative action decision did not really change anything for private employers,” says Yusuf Zakir, Chief Diversity Equity & Inclusion Officer at Davis Wright Tremaine, LLC (DWT). “It was illegal to make any decisions on the basis of protected characteristics before, and it remains so after the decision.”

The SCOTUS decision, however, emboldened many anti-DEIA supporters to broaden their opposition and threaten to undo DEIA programs. “These efforts are based on misunderstanding and mischaracterizations that are meant to create outrage and fear,” says Zakir. “But fear can be fought with sunlight.”

It’s essential that the DEIA commitment remains vital to attract talent. Keep in mind that prospective associates and laterals still consider DEIA an important value when evaluating and comparing firms. “On a daily basis, I receive messages from candidates who want to know about our DEI commitment,” says Zakir. “Don’t let the anti-DEI noise fool you. This is something that most people want to see at the companies they work for.”

MAKING A COMMITMENT

There are ways that legal administrators — at firms of all sizes — can continue to build a culture and environment of equity and inclusion.

“As legal administrators, we must see ourselves as the gateway, the starting point to a more diverse and inclusive legal profession. ... Take this task seriously and know that your voice matters,” says JaNae Martin, Legal Administrator at Helmers & Associates and Chair of ALA’s DEIA Committee. “Once we truly understand the critical role we play, we can change not only the legal profession, but also the judicial system, our local communities and firms across the country.”

Martin says legal administrators can continue to take key actions, including:

- » Maintaining DEIA as a critical element when establishing firm policies and procedures.
- » Advocating for DEIA issues when building candidate pipelines, recruiting, establishing events and programming
- » Communicate — internally and externally — the benefits of successful diversity efforts and how they deepen the firm’s talent, experience and capabilities.
- » Recognize the importance of active civic engagement and the DEIA connections it builds between your organization, employer and the community.



Fellowships also continue to be a way to demonstrate DEIA commitment. “Our Diversity Summer Fellowship provides an opportunity to involve members of communities historically underrepresented,” says Monique Grant, Office Administrator of the Raleigh and Wilmington offices of Brooks Pierce.

Having a formal position is also another way to demonstrate and communicate a firm’s values and commitment to DEIA. However, this includes DEI professionals having access to the management committee and firmwide managing partners, says Kate Reder Sheikh, a Partner in the Associate Practice Group of Major, Lindsey & Africa. “They need budget. Having a hamstrung DEI leadership may be almost as bad as having none at all.”

At DWT, it also means the firm continues to “move our DEI strategy forward, elevating the conversation along the way,” says Zakir. The strategy, based on four distinct pillars — Community, Growth, Education and Engagement — “gives us our North Star on DEI and makes it very clear where we are driving towards.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

Backing the position with stature and visibility counts. Long before the SCOTUS decision, Duane Morris was one of the first large firms to have a Chief Diversity Equity and Inclusion position. This officer also is an equity partner and member of the firm’s management committee. Additionally, Duane Morris has made ongoing and inclusive training an embedded component in onboarding and continuing professional development.

“**These efforts are based on misunderstanding and mischaracterizations that are meant to create outrage and fear. But fear can be fought with sunlight.**”

“Firmwide implicit bias training is mandatory for all employees, including attorneys and staff,” says Joseph K. West, Partner and Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer at Duane Morris. “We include a DEI segment on the agenda at both our annual meeting and our partners retreat, and all of our employee resource groups have been open to all attorneys and staff since their inception.”

Training also takes centerstage at Brooks Pierce, where DEIA programs for mentorship initiatives, bias training for everyone at the firm, and focused talent development programs for underrepresented groups help build a culture and environment of equity and inclusion, says Grant. She says these trainings also boost the firm’s reputation — an organic way to enhance recruiting.

NAVIGATING CLIENT BLOWBACK

Lawyers are admittedly cautious and risk averse. And in uncertain times, it may be easy to take a guarded approach. Rather than taking a safe approach, think about the firm’s core values and guiding principles — and lean into them.

“Our values are important because they show us where to navigate,” says Zakir. “You wouldn’t toss your compass during a storm.”

The challenges in traversing DEIA backlash led DWT to launch a group to help clients navigate the broader anti-DEI backlash and ensure that their commitment can remain steadfast and secure. “We realize that, with the onslaught against DEI, we may continue to see more lawsuits targeting DEI programs and efforts.”

West says the overall blowback also prompted Duane Morris to establish formal practice areas to address client concerns.

“Leaning on our years of experience in the field — along with firsthand knowledge from our own successful DEI program — the firm assists organizations in creating and sustaining a program that allows them to derive the benefits of diversity, equity and inclusion,” says West.

At the end of the day, these efforts must be embraced from the top. A firm’s guiding values need to bolster and complement DEIA efforts, and “must be etched into the foundation of your organization,” says Martin. “It starts at the top and has a trickle-down effect. It must be woven into the fabric of what makes your organization.”

You’ll have a more well-rounded firm for it. “A diverse workforce makes us stronger by bringing together expansive life experiences and different worldviews,” says Grant.



Learn the Latest on DEIA Initiatives with *Legal Management Talk*

Amid the current political and social climate, several organizations have begun to roll back their DEIA programs. Ann Thomas, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer at Stinson LLP, joined *Legal Management Talk* to discuss the state of DEIA today, how firms of different sizes should approach their DEIA initiatives, and how clients are still looking for their firms to show progress on diversity and inclusion. Tune in today: alanet.org/podcast

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Constructing a Winning Law Firm Merger or Acquisition

The way two firms combine can make or break their new business model.

BY ERIN BRERETON

“Firms need to confirm how they’ll approach attorney and staff career progression — as well as day-to-day tasks — after they combine.



As of the third quarter of 2024, 41 law firm mergers have been completed — a pace that’s on par with 2023; which is anticipated to rise in 2025, according to data from professional service consultancy Fairfax Associates.

In today’s competitive market, some firms may pursue a merger or acquisition with a firm that has a compatible book of business to potentially obtain opportunities for cross-selling and increase their cash flow, says Joseph A. Samarco, MBA, ALPP, Director of Revenue Operations at Hogan Lovells and Vice Chair of ALA’s Professional Development Advisory Committee.

“There are economic concerns — wanting higher revenues and hiring better talent,” Samarco says. “Firms below the top 10 will continue to try to grow and bring in new clients by merging. This adds other questions — will they need more space? What roles will there be on staff as firms continue to merge and downsize?”

In both mergers and acquisitions, careful planning and execution can be critical.

If your firm is preparing to join forces with another legal industry entity, to ensure a smooth transition and successful outcome, you may want to take the following factors into account.

ARRANGING OFFICE SPACE

If the larger firm that's participating in a transaction has enough room and feels having all talent in one location would be advantageous, the smaller firm that's involved might move into its office, according to Gene Commander, an executive business counselor for the legal profession.

In other instances, a smaller firm may present a chance for a firm to further its reach.

"If the [firm] is acquiring [it] to expand [its] geographic footprint in a different city [or] part of the country, you would probably not abandon that office space," Commander says. "You might move or expand, as the firm moves forward; it really depends on the needs of the combined firm."

Other elements can also be an influence, according to Kent Zimmermann, Principal Strategic Adviser to law firms at law firm management consulting firm Zeughauser Group.

"[It] would usually depend on things like how long the lease or leases are, if there's two of them — and also where the high-performing people most want to be; what would be good for recruiting," Zimmermann says.

Since joining Roetzel & Andress, a firm with offices in six states and Washington D.C., in October, Akron-based firm Brouse McDowell, for instance — which folded an eight-attorney firm into its operations in 2022 — has moved some firm members into Roetzel's Akron office.

The two firms have maintained separate locations in Cleveland since combining and are currently figuring out how to combine them, says shareholder Dan K. Glessner.

"We were able to negotiate ourselves out of the Akron office lease," Glessner says. "Both firms have commitments in Cleveland. In this economic environment for commercial real estate, it has to make sense to let somebody out of a lease."

“

Firms may try to schedule a number of formal or casual events to help new colleagues get to know each other after a merger or acquisition.”

PROPOSING SUCCESSION AND OPERATIONAL PLANNING

Firms need to confirm how they'll approach attorney and staff career progression — as well as day-to-day tasks — after they combine.

A number, such as Brouse McDowell, don't request a change in the other firm's leadership composition when coming on board.

"We were very comfortable becoming part of the team," Glessner says. "If we want to participate at those levels, we'll put our hat in the ring like everybody else."

Some firms may be hesitant to agree to appoint attorneys from an incoming firm as partners in the near future. If the firm that's being acquired will ultimately comprise a meaningful portion of the other firm, it could dilute its profitability, Zimmermann says.

Other organizations, though, may be able to accommodate a request to carry out the firm's previously planned partner promotions.

"For example, there are combinations we advised on this year where the smaller firm had certain lawyers in mind for promotion to the partnership," Zimmermann says. "It was important to them that those promotions stay on track through the course of the combination."

Transitioning all employees to singular systems can also be an important operational element to consider; firms should also factor in time to complete important tech-related M&A steps such as transferring information from one system to another so client data is retained from the firm that's being acquired.

After Glessner's previous firm combined with Roetzel, the latter firm provided instruction to help Brouse McDowell administrative staff members get up to speed on its technology systems.

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The more people who know, the greater likelihood of a leak, and when there's a leak, it's never good for the firm because the headhunters come out of the woodwork and do everything they can to dislodge people.”

“They did a nice job of setting up the training courses with their IT and accounting folks,” Glessner says.

Acquired firms may opt to gradually phase out preexisting devices they've been using, donating or otherwise disposing of them when it's time for them to be replaced, and then adopting the larger firm's preferred technology, Commander says.

“Over time, practice management, billing, accounting systems need to be unified,” he says. “If one organization is truly absorbing another — from a geographic standpoint — they're probably going to try to utilize the physical assets of the acquired organization until they can be upgraded.”

ESTABLISHING A COLLECTIVE CULTURE

While much of the focus during M&As tends to fall on the technical aspects of combining the two firms, creating a magnetic workplace culture is an essential part of enabling the two teams to work well together, according to Commander.



Leadership can encourage a unified culture, he says, by being transparent about the new firm's values, mission, vision and strategy.

“Is a combined firm realizing greater talent recruiting [and] business development competitiveness?” he says. “Are you seeing low attrition rates among talent — and clients? Are you bolstering the continuity and the sustainability of the combined firm? Those are the things that aren't talked about a lot — but may become very apparent two or three years down the road after the merger is completed.”

Firms may try to schedule a number of formal or casual events to help new colleagues get to know each other after a merger or acquisition.

When Brouse McDowell joined Roetzel, the two firms held a series of mixers between both larger and smaller practice groups within their offices and other locations, such as a winery.

“You want to create a laid-back atmosphere where people feel comfortable [talking] a little bit about themselves,” Glessner says. “Some of them were just an introduction, and then an opportunity to network [and] get to know each other. [At] one, the litigation practice chairs from both groups [had] a more organized agenda — [they] wanted to talk about what [they saw] as opportunities or obstacles.”

New York City-headquartered firm Hanly Conroy, shortly after its launch in 2002, tapped plaintiff's law firm Simmons Browder Gianaris Angelides & Barnard LLC, headquartered in Alton, Illinois, to help with a large-scale case. Members of the two firms built a strong relationship in the following years before deciding to merge in 2014, according to Jayne Conroy, shareholder at national law firm Simmons Hanly Conroy, LLP.

The Simmons firm then obtained space in the same building as Hanly Conroy in New York. To further facilitate firm members getting to know each other, Hanly Conroy co-founders Jayne Conroy and Paul Hanly obtained an apartment in a town near Alton where their attorneys could stay.

The firm later purchased a house next to the Simmons office in Alton for firm members to use.

“We felt it was important to have those kind of face-to-face meetings,” Conroy says. “It made it a lot easier for us

to actually have a place where people could stay for four or five days, or a few weeks if they needed to and were working on something together.”

NOTIFYING STAFF AND CLIENTS

Early discussions about a merger or acquisition may only involve a couple of people from the senior leadership team. The group typically starts to grow as talks continue, Zimmermann says – and can subsequently involve practice group leaders and other firm members.

The ideal time to tell firm employees and clients about the deal can vary, based on the details of the arrangement and leadership preferences. Some law firms may prefer to wait to tell the entire staff until the arrangement is fully fleshed out; others may favor earlier communication.

Zimmermann advises holding off until late in the process, if possible.

“The more people who know, the greater likelihood of a leak, and when there’s a leak, it’s never good for the firm because the headhunters come out of the woodwork and do everything they can to dislodge people,” he says. “[Even] a small number of people [leaving] can really change a firm.”

Although Holland & Knight’s combination with Nashville’s Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis, which gave Holland & Knight a nearly 2,000-attorney roster, wasn’t officially announced until 2023, Waller’s leadership told the firm’s employees about the deal in July 2022, on the day a local paper planned to publish an article about the firm being in merger-related discussions.

Throughout the more than 50 conversations that led up to the final agreement, Waller took considerable steps to ensure the potential deal remained under the radar,

according to Matt Burnstein, Waller’s former chair and managing partner, who is now the Executive Partner of Holland & Knight’s Nashville office.

“I conducted several months of talking about it internally, soliciting viewpoints, having different groups of Waller lawyers meet different groups of Holland & Knight lawyers in different cities,” Burnstein says. “It’s hard to bring 20 people from Nashville to Charlotte, North Carolina, for a meeting without somebody noticing – somebody [at] a competitor or a client being on the same plane. I had 18 people fly on four different planes early on.”

Restricting the knowledge of a potential merger or acquisition to a limited number of people can help prevent employee and client panic. Like a number of firms, until the arrangement with Holland & Knight was finalized, Waller maintained a delicate balance behind the scenes.

“I had concentric circles of knowledge and awareness and endorsement, starting in March 2022 and ending with a vote in December 2022 in favor of the combination,” Burnstein says. “Every aspect had to be thought through. Do I think that there was perfect confidentiality? No. But we had gotten all of the heaviest lifting done before it became so public that we couldn’t get it done in an orderly fashion. It took everything we had for the course of 12 months to achieve that result.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR




Erin Brereton is the Owner of Chicago Journalist Media, and a freelance writer, editor and content strategist who has written about the legal industry, business, technology and other topics for 20 years.

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The Power of Servant Leadership in Legal

Being an employee-first leader can help make your law firm a destination for top talent.

BY AMINA SERGAZINA



“**Schielke observes that her team members not only embrace the servant leadership philosophy but also pass it along to their colleagues and clients, creating a ripple effect that benefits the entire organization.**”

In a world where leadership is often associated with power, authority and top-down decision-making, one type of individual stands out as a shining example of a different approach — the servant leader. Seasoned professionals in leadership and development have highlighted the transformative impact of servant leadership in the legal industry, where high pressure and strict metrics often dominate workplace culture.

According to Harvard Law School, servant leaders have a “duty to focus primarily on meeting their subordinates’ needs rather than on their own or those of the organization.”

Jennifer Schielke, Co-Founder of the IT staffing firm Summit Group Solutions, embodies this philosophy. With 30 years of experience spanning auditing, consulting and running her own business, Schielke has developed a leadership style focused on prioritizing her team.

“For me, servant leadership is really about being outward-focused,” Schielke explains. “It’s not about telling people what to do, but showing them, teaching

them and then letting them take ownership. It's about investing in your people and meeting them where they're at, rather than expecting them to conform to a one-size-fits-all approach."

This belief has been integral to Summit Group Solutions' success. Operating in the fiercely competitive IT staffing industry – where, like in legal, retaining top talent is key – Schielke focuses on the professional development and personal needs of her employees. By fostering a workplace culture rooted in trust and mutual respect, she has built a cohesive and high-performing team deeply aligned with the company's mission.

"When people come through our doors, I make it a point to really get to know them," she shares. "I spend a lot of time in the interview and onboarding process, talking to them about our culture and values, and treating them like mentees. I want them to know that I'm here to support their success, not just to get the job done."

This personal investment in her employees has paid dividends in terms of engagement, loyalty and overall team performance. Schielke observes that her team members not only embrace the servant leadership philosophy but also pass it along to their colleagues and clients, creating a ripple effect that benefits the entire organization.

"They're not just doing their jobs – they're embodying the servant leadership mindset," she says. "Watching them use this approach to better serve our customers and candidates is incredibly rewarding. That's the kind of outcome I find the most fulfilling."

Of course, adopting servant leadership in high-pressure industries comes with its challenges. Schielke acknowledges the difficulty of maintaining this approach in environments where metrics like billable hours and productivity often take precedence.

"It's not always easy, especially in an industry where numbers are so important," she admits. "But if you establish a strong foundation of core values and expectations, those become the guideposts for navigating the more technical aspects of the work."

SERVANT LEADERSHIP QUALITIES

Leading by example is critical to this process, Schielke emphasizes. "You can't take someone farther than you've gone yourself," she says. "As a leader, you have to model

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You can't take someone farther than you've gone yourself ... as a leader, you have to model the behavior you want to see in your team.”

the behavior you want to see in your team. That means adapting your communication style, putting aside your own agenda and truly listening to what your people need.”

While the philosophy of servant leadership often emphasizes intangible values like empathy and trust, Schielke underscores the importance of tangible actions to demonstrate care:

- » Fair Compensation and Benefits: Offering competitive pay and robust benefits shows a commitment to employees' well-being.
- » Financial Literacy Education: Providing resources on topics like payroll, retirement planning and benefits utilization empowers employees to make informed decisions.
- » Professional Development Investments: Allocating resources for training and skill enhancement ensures growth opportunities align with both individual and organizational goals.

While Schielke has seen remarkable success with this approach, she's not alone in championing servant leadership. Tiffany McLean, a Learning and Training Manager at Warner Norcross + Judd and a member of the Metropolitan Detroit Chapter, shares a similar philosophy. McLean – who is a member of ALA's Professional Development Advisory Committee – has an approach that is grounded in the belief that leadership is about fostering team success, not personal accolades.



“

By prioritizing people over profits, they are not only achieving professional success but also fostering a sense of shared purpose and humanity within their organizations.”

“It’s not about my success,” McLean explains. “It’s about my team’s success. It’s about being there for them and supporting them, whether it’s a personal issue or a work-related challenge.”

McLean prioritizes creating a psychologically safe environment where team members feel comfortable sharing their struggles. This openness is central to building trust and fostering growth.

“It’s letting them know that they have that psychological safety to speak with me on whatever issues they’re encountering,” McLean says. “To me, that’s what being a servant leader is all about — being there for my team when they need me and realizing that my success lies in their success.”

McLean’s commitment to servant leadership was solidified by a pivotal moment early in her career. During a meeting, McLean witnessed a leader take responsibility for a team member’s error, shielding the individual from public embarrassment.

“I literally saw my leader get up from the chair and jump on the sword and say, ‘Hey, it was me,’” McLean recounts. “That was a huge ‘aha’ moment for me, and that’s the type of leader I want to be.”

MAKING IT WORK IN LEGAL

The legal industry, where McLean has spent much of her career, presents unique challenges for servant leaders. The fast-paced and results-driven culture can sometimes deemphasize the human element. However, McLean sees this as an opportunity to bring empathy to the forefront.

“Being a servant leader is so important in the legal space because you have to lead with empathy,” McLean explains. “You can use your skills as a servant leader to really show concern for others, help them realize that it’s okay to make mistakes, and remind them that we’re going to get through challenges together.”

McLean shared her personal experience of how servant leadership might look even at the end of a person’s time at the company. One team member outgrew their role and moved on to a more aligned career opportunity. Rather than viewing this as a loss, McLean celebrated the

team member’s growth and continued to support their journey. McLean says that to this day she receives warm words of support from this person.

“To me, that’s the highest compliment a servant leader can receive,” McLean says. “Knowing you guided someone to be the best version of themselves is incredibly rewarding.”

For leaders like Schielke and McLean, the rewards of servant leadership far outweigh its challenges. By prioritizing people over profits, they are not only achieving professional success but also fostering a sense of shared purpose and humanity within their organizations.

“There’s just something special about watching your people grow and thrive,” Schielke concludes. “When you invest in them and show that you truly care about their well-being, it’s amazing to see how they, in turn, invest in the company and each other. That’s the kind of culture I’m proud to be part of.”

As McLean reflects on the lessons she learned, she offers this advice for aspiring leaders: “Listen to your people, trust them and let them know that mistakes are okay. Building a culture of empathy and support transforms not just your team but the entire workplace.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amina Sergazina (they/she) is an immigrant from Kazakhstan who is passionate about justice. They believe in the power of journalism and view it not just as a tool for awareness but also as

one to change the world for the better. In 2018 they, along with their mother and little brother, immigrated to the United States in Chicago. Sergazina grew up on American movies and always dreamed of living in the U.S. They were granted a full ride scholarship to Columbia College Chicago and graduated in May of 2023 with a bachelor’s in journalism.



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Reverse Recruiting Could Be Your Next Winning Strategy

In a tough job market, this hiring strategy can help candidates find your firm.

BY SARAH MASTROCOLA



“Whether it be working with clients to rewrite their cover letters, simulate interview scenarios or optimize their LinkedIn profile, reverse recruiters take a specialized interest in their clients’ futures by revitalizing the skills necessary to stand out in the job market.”

We live in a world dominated by competition. The scent follows us everywhere, especially in larger cities that offer many worthy players at our disposal. The most intense competition, however, comes to us in the job market.

In the last year alone, the number of job openings in the United States fell by 1.8 million, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The slowed-down hiring rate contributed to this trend, raising the stakes for qualified applicants. Coupled with this hiring hiatus is a surge of growth in the quality and quantity of candidates: 46% of professionals contemplate quitting and 85% plan to transition to a new role in 2025.

Fewer people are staying put, and the hiring pool is evolving fast. A recent ZipRecruiter Job Seeker Confidence Index shows a steady rise in job seekers’ faith in their ability to approach the hiring cycle and come out on top. Despite this, many applicants find the job search leads to anything but gold. A recent survey by ZipRecruiter revealed that only 46% of new hires secured their jobs within one month of getting laid off, compared to 60% in 2023.

The challenge is getting noticed by the right people, which can be difficult when you are constantly surrounded by MVPs. Enter the concept known as reverse recruiting.

Reverse recruiting took shape in the early 2000s as an upgrade from career coaching or counseling. These career services satisfy growing demands for professional support among job seekers, notably executive-level candidates shifting careers later in the game.

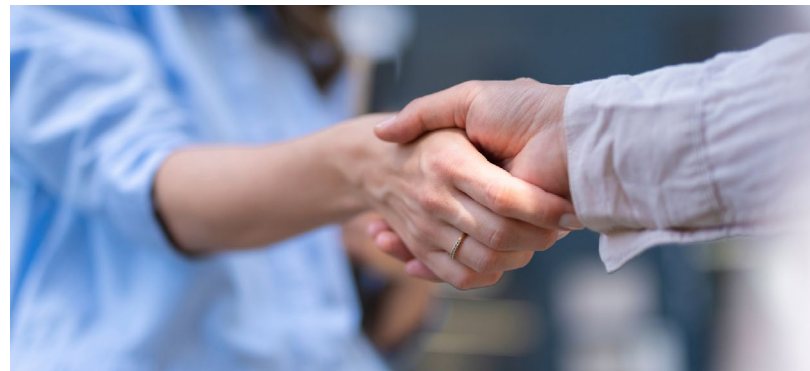
HOW REVERSE RECRUITING WORKS

If you are going through a job transition, relocating or experiencing a layoff, a reverse recruiter is a hireable resource who can boost your visibility and offer the necessary tools for becoming a stronger candidate. As the job market becomes more competitive, many — especially attorneys and associates — realize it takes much more than an impressive resume to pass the first round of interviews.

Offering personalized guidance through every step of the job search process, a reverse recruiter — common monikers include talent advisor, career development manager, talent acquisition specialist and career advocate — does for the individual what a traditional recruiter does for an employer. While a standard career coach advises you on what to do, a reverse recruiter shows you how to do it. Furthermore, a reverse recruiter markets their client to their network, promoting that client's skills to recruiters and hiring managers searching for reputable candidates.

Whether it be working with clients to rewrite their cover letters, simulate interview scenarios or optimize their LinkedIn profile, reverse recruiters take a specialized interest in their clients' futures by revitalizing the skills necessary to stand out in the job market. With an extensive network and years of experience in various career fields, reverse recruitment professionals are generally well-equipped to support executive-level candidates in their job searches. Common services cater to specific faculties, experiences and needs of clients across several industries.

Some reverse recruiters also serve as a resource for legal HR managers and traditional executive recruiters, enhancing their efficiency by recommending pre-vetted talent. In the highly competitive legal market, reverse recruiters may be an optimal referral source for reasons such as:



- » Access to passive talent and/or candidates with specialized skill sets
- » Strengthened reputation and employer branding
- » Cost-effective talent acquisition

The emerging community of mid to senior-level reverse recruiters keeps a finger on the pulse of legal market trends and best practices for climbing the corporate counsel ranks. We have recently witnessed an increase in the demand for work-life balance and endorsement of hybrid/remote work structures, but the competition only stiffens as more partners and associates across various firms can be seen moving to in-house roles at earlier phases in their careers.

REVERSE RECRUITING PERKS

Among the handful of firms that have adopted the reverse recruiting model, many specialize in working with attorneys. Whether they are searching for outside or in-house opportunities, a clear perk of working with a third party is the promise of confidentiality, which allows lawyers to deliberate all aspects of their transition without alerting partners or clients.

Additionally, reverse recruiters help package a client's relevant experience into a value-driven personal brand. The collaborative relationship between both parties yields an ideal environment for a tailored job search strategy to grow. Working with an adviser who helps prepare one's application materials and links them with representatives interested in hiring someone of their caliber provides a strategic advantage in the highly competitive legal field.

For attorneys exploring an in-house transition, reverse recruitment professionals focus on understanding their clients' practice area and locale to determine how best to promote them. Staying attuned to the evolving talent needs of managing partners, this third-party resource

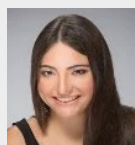
will diagnose a client's most marketable skills and gauge how they will perform in a given market. When a vacancy arises at a prominent firm, having a perpetual advocate in one's corner could change the game.

Nearly 80% to 90% of job seekers are finding their next job placement through networking. The reverse recruitment industry complements this trend by embodying a "two heads are better than one" approach. The personalized, strategic assistance this group of professionals offers is valuable given the uptick in lateral moves among big-time law firms.

The growing popularity of hybrid work, company-wide innovation initiatives and niche skill sets have also impacted the overall structure of many legal organizations, putting greater pressure on the need for versatile and adaptable talent. According to the most recent ETS Human Progress Report, 86% of people surveyed believe that continuous learning is an integral factor in achieving success, particularly as employers increasingly seek out proficiency in organizational skills like communication. Reverse recruitment may help attorneys not only strengthen and expand their skill repertoire but also develop a proactive mindset centered around upskilling and reskilling.

Reverse recruiting aims to ameliorate the job search process, emphasizing the value of personalized career services, opening the door to the unpublished job market, and, ultimately, helping candidates rise to the occasion. The wave of reverse recruitment work flips a well-established market on its head, encouraging attorneys and associates to dive deeper into an Olympic-sized pool of opportunity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sarah Mastrocola is a writer and striving marketing and communications professional based in New York City. She obtained a bachelor's degree in English from Haverford College and is currently pursuing her master's degree in media, culture and communication at New York University. When she finishes school, she hopes to enter the entertainment and media corporate landscape. Thus far, her experience extends to copywriting, digital marketing, narrative journalism, brand strategy, B2B public relations, blog writing and strategic communications.

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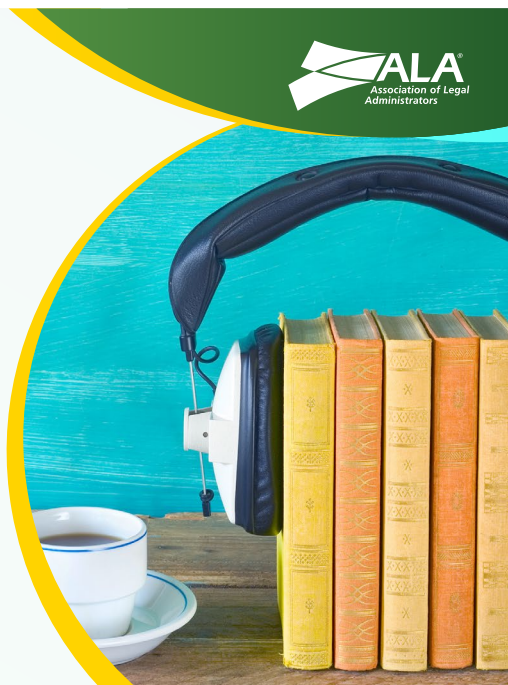
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Rebranding a Law Firm: Why, How and Lessons Learned

BY GRANT A. WALSH AND NICOLE W. JOSEPH



“For established firms, the idea of rebranding can be daunting. Not only is it costly and time-consuming, but when it’s not done with thought and preparation it can lead to confusion for clients and rancor amongst the firm’s attorneys.”

Law firm naming has been bound by both regulation and custom for almost all the history of the modern profession. In recent years, however, the naming rules for law firms have changed, opening up the possibility to create branding that better reflects a firm than a list of last names.

So why rebrand? It takes time to establish a firm, and in that time things can change. Firms merge, named-partners leave or retire, and other factors can reshape a firm’s identity. Moving away from using partners’ names can be a way to future-proof a brand against any further changes or upheaval.

There’s also been a rise in nontraditional firms over the last decade plus. The new naming rules allow those firms to align themselves closer to the modern business world through creative branding.

REBRANDING CHALLENGES

For established firms, the idea of rebranding can be daunting. Not only is it costly and time-consuming, but when it’s not done with thought and

preparation it can lead to confusion for clients and rancor among the firm's attorneys.

Some of the challenges are:

- » **Cost:** Rebranding is expensive, especially since outside help is usually necessary.
- » **Time:** While support staff can help with the process, the firm leadership will need to be involved as well, and the rebrand can add significant work for all involved.
- » **Establishing a vision:** Rebranding isn't just about changing your logo or website color scheme. It's a strategic action to define and communicate who the firm is — defining that can be a complicated process that requires getting stakeholders on the same page.

THE PROCESS

When considering a rebrand, the firm first needs to establish what they're looking to accomplish with the change. Having a clear vision will help keep the process on track as more people become involved and there are many decisions to be made. Once that's established, the firm will need to build a team that will likely include an outside vendor that specializes in marketing and rebranding.

Outside help is often necessary because, while the firm may have a clear vision of what they want, having people with both the experience and technical expertise required to achieve that vision can help to make the process as smooth as possible.

Here is a partial list of what needs to be considered for a rebrand:

- » Choosing a new name: Make sure it reflects the firm's values and not what's trending in the market. Intellectual property availability and protections as well as jurisdictional bar rules for law firm names should also be part of the analysis.
- » Color schemes are deceptively important to branding.
- » Tagline(s): This brief introduction tells the world who the firm is.
- » How to visually represent the firm, including choosing stock or custom images.
- » Creating consistent style and messaging both in visual and written content.
- » Updating everything with the new branding, even old content.



- » Rebrand business cards, signature lines, stationery, phone messages, etc., in preparation for the launch. Don't forget to update banners and other conference branding.
- » Submit the proper paperwork before the launch. This can include registering the new name with the proper authorities, including the IRS, state agencies and state bars.

LESSONS LEARNED

We recently did a rebrand and learned some valuable lessons. Starting the process early internally let us really refine our vision before moving forward. This prep work helped to remove roadblocks throughout the process. We also recommend investing in a go-to-market model that creates a structure for the rebrand and we found shortened the Q&A phase.

Keep in mind that leadership and support staff need to be able to accommodate the extra work that the rebrand will be adding to their plate. And communication is key. Be transparent with your attorneys and staff so that they can trust the process. This change affects everyone, and to make it a success, the whole firm needs to buy into why it's important and how it will benefit them in the long run.

Lastly, timing is everything. Be prepared so that the firm can pull the trigger at the opportune time.

Rebranding isn't something a firm should do on a whim. It's a big task that takes a lot of tangible and intangible resources to get right. But when done well, rebranding can refine and clarify who a firm is and how they can benefit clients now and into the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS







Grant A. Walsh is Co-Founder and Co-Managing Partner of CM Law, and is also the firm's General Counsel. His practice focuses on commercial litigation, dispute resolution and contractual matters for domestic and international clients in a number of industries. In addition to his civilian law practice, Walsh is a commissioned officer in the Texas State Guard, where he currently serves as a Major (O-4) in the JAG Corps.

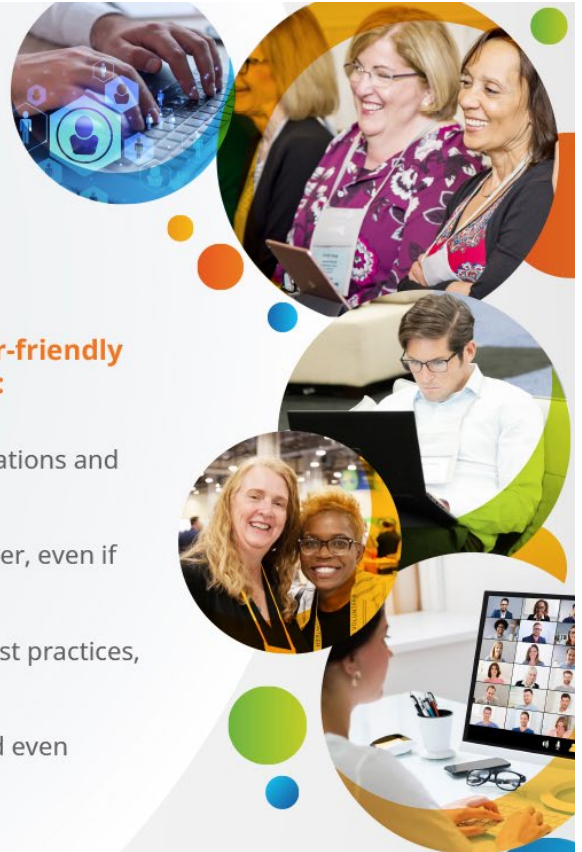


Nicole W. Joseph is the Chief Operating Officer & Finance Director at CM Law. She oversees daily operations and finance and leads the plans for strategic expansion. She has over 25 years of experience in operations, technology and finance, with firms such as Moody's Corporation and Morgan Stanley, and has also been an Associate Instructor at Columbia University since 2017. She earned her bachelor's degree from Hofstra University, holds an Executive Master of Science from Columbia University, and Executive Education from Harvard Business School.

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My Journey to a Healthier Me

Through lifestyle changes and grace for myself, I've taken back my health.

BY ROBERTA A. BAUER



“Feeling seen, understood and valued is one of the most powerful feelings you can give your team members. The more directly you address unspoken conversations around things like bias and burnout, the more your team will feel safe to tell you when they are struggling and need extra support.”

Given our hectic, often demanding day jobs, our health can fall down our priority list. While I've been on a health journey since I was diagnosed with a chronic autoimmune disease at 19 years old, I didn't always live my life like I was on a health journey.

That changed in my late 40s. I had bilateral hip and right knee replacements, which somehow sent me into an early menopause. I had managed to keep my weight down through my 20s, 30s and even most of my 40s — but now my figure was changing. My weight kept slowly increasing; I found myself with a midlife tire around my waist.

I knew I had to make some changes to get my health back on track.

FINDING THE RIGHT METHOD FOR SUCCESS

It's important to note that I worked in tandem with my doctor, and you should do the same. What worked for me might not work for you (or even be appropriate for your situation). But I wanted to share a bit more about

my experience — and the benefits I'm now feeling — because I decided to prioritize my health. Quite simply, I feel amazing!

I started to look at making some lifestyle changes. This is when I began to research intermittent fasting. My husband, Paul, began doing it and his weight gains were turning into losses. Paul lost almost 25 pounds effortlessly by intermittently fasting. Yet I still rejected it! I honestly believed that eating breakfast was “the most important meal of the day!” Do you even know where that statement came from? No doctor ever stated that — the breakfast cereal companies did. Score one for marketing because I fell for it and thought I couldn't possibly start my morning workout without eating breakfast or drinking a protein shake.

So four years ago, I decided to take my cue from Paul and give it a try. I have to be honest — it wasn't easy at the beginning. I could easily fast for 12 hours (from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.), but it was a struggle for me to get past that 12-hour mark without feeling overwhelmed or cranky. In my research, I came upon Mindy Pelz, DC, and her books *Fast Like a Girl* and *The Menopause Reset*. They were truly enlightening to me! I've also become an avid listener of her podcast, *The Resetter Podcast* with Dr. Mindy Pelz.

My lifestyle change also includes a commitment to exercising. I strength train almost daily with my goal being to complete five to six strength trainings weekly, including two high intensity interval training (HIIT) workouts as part of the week. Another change I've made is learning to allow myself grace in all areas of my life. I can only do what I can do. That's a big step for someone who's an overachiever. I don't beat myself up (much) when I don't achieve every workout each week. I just schedule them for the next week and commit again. Being kinder to myself has been a huge step!

These workouts really helped me tone my body while teaching me that I didn't need to eat three meals a day, nor did I need to eat breakfast. Little by little, my stamina for fasting increased and suddenly I was fasting up to 16 hours most days. Continuing to allow myself some grace, I also ate when I was hungry. For example, if I'm hungry and need to eat before the 16 hours are up, I eat something healthy — not snacks, but a meal with vegetables and protein.



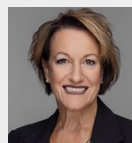
THE NEW, HEALTHIER ME

My health is so much better now, and that's so important to me. My rheumatologist regularly tells me if he didn't know my history and the joints I had replaced, he would swear I didn't have an autoimmune disease — I smile from ear to ear when I hear that! Before I made these lifestyle changes, I was prediabetic; now my A1C has dropped to a normal level. I'm still fasting 16-plus hours most days, but I still have days where I'm hungry and I eat. That's where that grace I give myself comes in handy! I truly love strength training and feeling stronger. I've incorporated other types of workouts as well, so I'm trying new classes. Most importantly, I put myself first and schedule my workouts daily.

Taking care of yourself is such a big and important step. But how do you achieve that when you're working full time, raising a family, etc.? It truly means carving out the time you need and doing it first before you fill your calendar with all the other activities. I've noted my workouts, tracked them and not just weighed myself, but also taken measurements so I could see the inches come off. It's always a surprise when you see the inches change even when the weight is still the same.

It took some time, but I'm in my groove and have found what works for me. I truly hope it inspires you to make your health a priority this year!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Roberta A. Bauer is the Regional Office Administrator at Ogletree Deakins and serves on ALA's Member Ambassador Committee.