

Maximizing the Business Development Potential of Laterals

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It is so exciting when an adopted child arrives. Parents, relatives, and close friends lavish affection on this new addition so that it feels loved and secure. When a family becomes serial adopters, however, newcomers are no longer a novelty, individual attention gets divided, and everyone has to get back to work. Welcome to the world of lateral fatigue.

In the above allegory, firms have parent-figures (the lateral hiring committee) who bring the lateral into their world; relatives (members of the lateral's practice group) who should enthusiastically embrace the new lateral into the family; and close friends (firm management) who should actively support the parents, relatives, and the lateral. The reality is that there is a natural inclination to ignore new laterals soon after they arrive. Especially in firms that have been through mergers and have absorbed many laterals, there is an unconscious internal dialogue that goes something like; "I'm too busy with my own practice to give much of myself to every new person who joins our firm." This tendency is increasingly prevalent when the new lateral is in another practice group, another office, or another country.

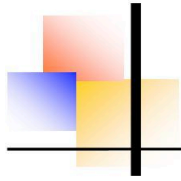
Overcoming Lateral Fatigue

To overcome lateral fatigue, we have to understand the needs of the lateral. In a study conducted by Major, Hagen & Africa many years ago, they found the most important factors for a lateral when choosing a firm were the firm's culture, the personality and style of its partners, and the support that the lateral expected to receive. The firm has the responsibility to come through on its promises by creating the kind of environment in which the lateral can thrive.

In recognition of these needs, firms should create unshakeable protocols that require the hiring team, practice group leaders, group members, cross-group members, and firm leadership to step up and play ongoing integrative roles, especially during the early phase of a lateral's tenure. The following short checklist of steps can be implemented to provide this support:

Firm Actions:

- **Hiring committee appointee**
 - Periodic check-ins, especially early in the relationship
- **Practice group leader**
 - Periodic check-ins to educate and learn how to support the lateral
 - Provide business development skills training if needed (often laterals from in-house or government positions have never sold anything in their lives!)
- **Practice group members**
 - Lunches, dinners, after-hours social events to welcome the lateral
- **Complementary practice groups leaders and members**
 - Encourage friendships with targeted complementary lawyers
 - Invite to group meetings
 - Invite to speak at group meetings



- **Senior firm management**

- Outreach to welcome and invite feedback, questions, and communication
- Periodic check-ins

It Takes Two to Tango

For all the good intentions of the above list, savvy laterals must realize the onus is on them to succeed. Overcoming lateral fatigue requires the lateral to take the bull by the horns and make the right things happen. The following is a list, from the lateral's perspective, of things they can do to get a strong start in their new firms:

Lateral Actions:

Build key internal relationships/networks

- Within your group
- In complementary groups and offices
- Support cross-group initiatives

Create an internal brand

- Have the firm tout your successes
- Take internal leadership positions
- Educate others as to your capabilities (doubly so if you have a practice that is new to the firm)

Establish internal credibility

- Build internal trust with other lawyers in the firm
 - Conduct joint marketing
 - Give opportunities to others and help them succeed with your contacts
 - Attend group meetings and contribute to the success of the group

Learn the systems

Clarify expectations – yours and others

Clearly understand the compensation system

Develop stronger business development skills

Develop a context for reaching out to your contacts and get meetings

- I've moved to a new firm and I'd like to tell you why I made this decision.
- I've met a partner here who I think you should meet.
- Can you arrange an introduction to ?
- I'd like to invite you to a seminar at my new firm.

Laterals represent tremendous potential to firms, and new firms can be exceptional platforms for the right laterals. With the proper approach and follow through, it can be a win-win for both parties.

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