

Four Tips for Developing a Robust Lateral Integration Plan

Successful integration of a lateral into a law firm can be measured by new originations, but the number of new clients only tells part of the story. The success of the recruiting process can also be measured by how quickly the lateral assimilates into the culture of the firm and the speed and scope of the marketing and business development issues that were successfully handled. These 'soft' variables depend on a thorough integration plan and diligent execution.

Get Started Early

The sooner the firm begins planning for the lateral's arrival, the better. There is a lot to do and time is needed to plan accordingly. It's important to the firm's brand that marketing materials, website and bio information for the attorney is updated before the announcement is made. Don't wait until a day or two before the announcement to involve marketing. Set up a meeting with the marketing folks and the lateral early on to enable marketing the time to put a strong plan together. This also ensures the lateral has time to collect the materials marketing will need to update the website and other materials.

Plan Accordingly

A lateral integration plan is actually several distinct plans. A well developed 'master' plan includes a public relations plan, an internal communications plan, a marketing plan, a client development plan and a plan for 'on boarding' the new partner including the human resources, operations, training, conflicts and technology issues that need to be addressed. Firms active in lateral recruiting should have a robust template and process in place which can be quickly updated for a new lateral candidate.

The PR plan should identify the media channels and any 'exclusivities' which the firm will grant in exchange for prominent coverage. The plan should identify the publications and contact information for reporters who will receive press releases with the main 'talking points' or specific reasons clients will benefit from the combination.

The PR plan should identify and determine responses to any potential negative information which might arise from media coverage of the move. Lastly, don't forget to notify and monitor coverage of the move among the main social media channels, blogs and discussion groups that follow developments in the lateral's practice area.

The marketing and promotional plan should include a list of marketing materials that need to be updated, the authored publications coming with the attorney and the updates needed for the attorney's bio. It should itemize the directory listings, social media sites, award publications and professional associations in which the attorney's profile will need to be updated. The plan should also outline the advertising which will be placed to announce the attorney's move as well as any events or client



receptions held in her honor. Lastly, the plan should describe how the clients of the firm will be notified of the new attorney's arrival and who will handle the notification.

The internal communications plan should include how the firm will notify people inside the firm of the lateral's arrival and who will sign the notification. It should also detail the meetings the new partner will be asked to attend as well as outline important firm event dates and the role the new attorney may be asked to play in each event. If appropriate, a plan to inform the firm's network of referral sources, like bankers, accountants and referral networks, along with any strategic alliances or consulting groups, should also be outlined in this section of the plan.

Most importantly, the master integration plan should include a client development and cross servicing plan. The plan should outline the new attorney's clients likely to port over to the firm, the firm's clients with expansion potential and prospective clients who may be attracted to the firm as a result of the combination. Each key client and prospect should have a plan of action with specific strategies for how the introduction will be made.

Bring Value to Your Clients

In most cases clients aren't waiting with bated breath to meet the new partner. A meeting solely to introduce a partner is often seen by clients as unnecessary. So, plan meetings to include other agenda items that provide value to clients. To make a change, clients need a compelling reason to switch providers. That means your introduction of the new partner should be accompanied with a summary of how they have helped similar companies, how they can solve a unique problem for the client or ways in which they can generate greater efficiencies or cost reductions. Finding a value added angle requires research, planning and a heavy dose of objectivity, but the result will be appreciated by clients.

Plan Support for the Long Run

The integration of a lateral's clients can take several months to complete. So integration plans should pay special attention to the period of time after the initial enthusiasm and energy has waned. In particular, create check in or progress reporting deadlines and have two to three people assigned to mentor, guide and troubleshoot for the lateral throughout the plan time frame. The team could include a senior partner with influence in the firm to troubleshoot problems, a partner to act as a mentor and a dedicated marketing support person.

Planning for the integration of a new partner is a series of distinct activities and plans which all must be implemented quickly and seamlessly. In all of these plans, strong and consistent communication is the key to the successful integration of lateral partners.

Eric Dewey is managing principal of Group Dewey Consulting, focusing his practice on business development coaching and training and lateral acquisition support services. Readers who would like a free copy of a master integration plan checklist and template can email the author at



Group Dewey Consulting

Wise Counsel

eric@groupdeweyconsulting.com. His blog, Lawyer Up! can be read on his website
www.groupdewey.com.

