

[What is a Collaborative Law Firm and ... Does It Matter?](#)

Posted by [Cordell Parvin](#) on July 19, 2011

I recently read an [HBR Blog:Why a Great Individual is Better than a Good Team](#). This appeared a week after [Bill Taylor](#) posted [Great People Are Overrated](#) Parts 1 and 2 and the day before [Turn Your Group into a True Team](#). By the time I finished reading these HBR blog posts I wondered if a collaborative law firm is best, or whether a firm, like my old firm, that had some great individuals that rarely collaborated on anything is best? What do you think?



When I ran for the board of my old firm and made presentations to our lawyers, I included a quote by former [IBM](#) CEO [Thomas Watson](#). He said:

I believe the real difference between success and failure in a corporation can very often be traced to the question of how well the organization brings out the great energies and talents of its people. What does it do to help these people find common cause with each other?

I think that quote helps answer the question. Law firms must hire and develop the most talented lawyers they can find. (Without talented lawyers who are well trained, all the teamwork in the world will not matter.) Then the firm must bring out the great energies of their lawyers and help them find a common cause with each other.

Think about the companies that really do this well. I immediately think about [Apple](#), [Zappos](#), [Starbucks](#), [Ritz Carlton](#). Those companies have great clarity on their company culture and hire the best talent they can find who clearly fit that company culture. Having clarity in their culture and having gotten it right in the hiring process, it is easier to bring out great energies and talents and help their people find a common cause with each other.

In most law firms, lawyers are hired based on their class rank. Law firm interviews are short and sweet. In many cases the lawyer interviewer spends more time talking about the firm than learning about the candidate.

Even with firms that get to know law students over a portion of a summer, not enough time is spent determining if the students have a burning desire to become an outstanding lawyer. Once hired, helping lawyers and staff find a common cause with each other is considered too "touchy-feely." Law firms claim to have what they describe as "the firm culture," but rarely do the lawyers even agree on what it is. I think that is a shame, and frankly a big waste of money recruiting and training law students who will ultimately be gone in just a few years.

So what do you think? Can a law firm hire lawyers that are so talented that they are worth more than 100 average lawyers and still build a collaborative team? I believe it will only happen if the firm culture includes collaboration and the firm compensates its lawyers in part on their teamwork. Does your firm do that?

I hope you will read my post tomorrow to get my take on how law firms can determine whether a law student or lateral hire will be a great lawyer based on how a medical school at a university close to my heart considers applicants.

Cordell Parvin Blog

DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LAW FIRM RAINMAKERS

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