

# 2010 Law Firm Associate Support and Professional Development Survey

Presented by ALM Legal Intelligence and  
Practical Law Company

Practical Law Company, Inc.  
747 Third Avenue, 36<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10017  
[www.practicallaw.com](http://www.practicallaw.com)  
(646) 562-3405

ALM Legal Intelligence  
120 Broadway, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 12071  
[www.almlegalintelligence.com](http://www.almlegalintelligence.com)  
(888) 770-5647

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ALM Legal Intelligence offers detailed business information for and about the legal industry, focused on the top U.S. and international law firms. The division's online research web service (<http://www.ALMlegalintel.com>) provides subscribers with direct, on-demand access to ALM's extensive database of surveys, rankings and lists related to law firms and the legal industry. The site also includes an online store where non-subscribers can, on an individual basis, purchase and download preformatted individual law firm reports, ALM Legal Intelligence research reports, and selected current-year survey data.

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# About Practical Law Company

Practical Law Company provides online legal know-how for transactional lawyers. Our corporate, securities and finance how-to guidance, annotated model documents, market practice reports and more help lawyers practice efficiently, get up to speed quickly and spend more time on the work that matters most.

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# Overview

Given recent changes in the legal industry – from the rise of alternative fee arrangements to the decline of lockstep compensation – associate training is in the spotlight more than ever before. But what are firms actually doing today to train associates?

To find out the state of law firm professional development initiatives, Practical Law Company and ALM surveyed partners, professional development specialists, law librarians and administrative staff about their own associate training programs. We asked questions about training techniques, time devoted to training, program oversight, client involvement and more in order to assess the landscape.

This report is meant to help law firm leaders, professional development specialists and other firm administrative staff better understand how peer firms tackle associate training so that they can, in turn, develop and implement programs that successfully prepare attorneys for practice.

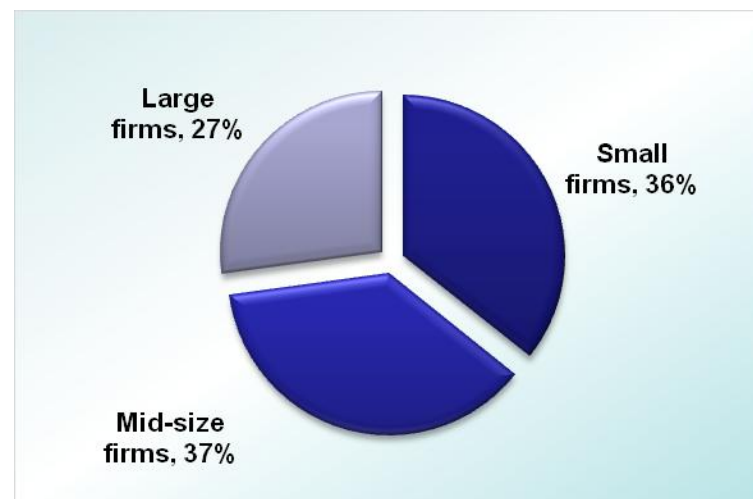


# Methodology

- ALM Legal Intelligence and Practical Law Company jointly produced a survey focusing on associate training and professional development in law firms. The survey was sponsored by Practical Law.
- Between the dates of August 17, 2010 and September 17, 2010, ALM Legal Intelligence conducted an online survey which was administered via email invitation to a confidential, web-based questionnaire.
- ALM sent an email invitation to 7,546 recipients.
- Practical Law sent an invitation to an additional 24,637 recipients.
- Total responses were 140 usable surveys, for a rate of return of 2.6%.

# Methodology

- **Respondent Demographics**
  - 47% of respondents were partners; 21% were professional development specialists; 12% were law librarians and the remainder hold various management and administrative positions at the firms.
- **Firm Demographics**
  - We segmented firm size groupings into small (1 to 99 attorneys), mid-size (100 to 499 attorneys) and large firms (500+ attorneys).
  - Responses were evenly distributed across all firm sizes.
- **Geographic Distribution**
  - Northeast: 34%; Midwest: 30%; South: 24%; West: 12%.



# Executive Summary

- **The majority of respondents report that firms have some degree of associate training or professional development programs in place.**
  - Large and mid-size firms are more likely to have formal training programs, whereas small firms rely on ad hoc systems.
- **The median time for associate training is around 3.6 hours; the larger the firm, the greater the amount of time.**
  - Partners spend the most time with associates and two-thirds of firms report that partners oversee the training programs.
- **Professional developers spend the second most amount of time helping train associates (in regards to total training time).**
- **On-the-job training and partner mentoring are the most common methods of associate training, followed by regular practice groups and classes.**
  - More than half of firms use online training resources and in-house training materials.
- **Two in three firms made changes to their associate training programs in the past year.**
  - Most cite associate retention as the main driver; however, half report that associates themselves are the catalyst for change. Firms also changed their programs to keep training fresh.



# Executive Summary (continued)

- **The most significant change to associate training programs was time on task - more time devoted to associate training.**
  - Firms report that it is too soon to determine the impact of these changes.
- **At least three in four firms find how-to guides, model forms and checklist sheets very or somewhat helpful as training support materials.**
- **More than half of firms use a compensation structure that includes lockstep and merit-based components.**
- **One in three firms involves clients in the training process.**
  - Clients have input in a variety of ways, the most oft-cited examples included sitting in on seminars and panel discussions.
- **Two in five firms say that clients are reluctant to include junior associates in billing hours on their matters.**





# Key Findings



# Associate Training Programs

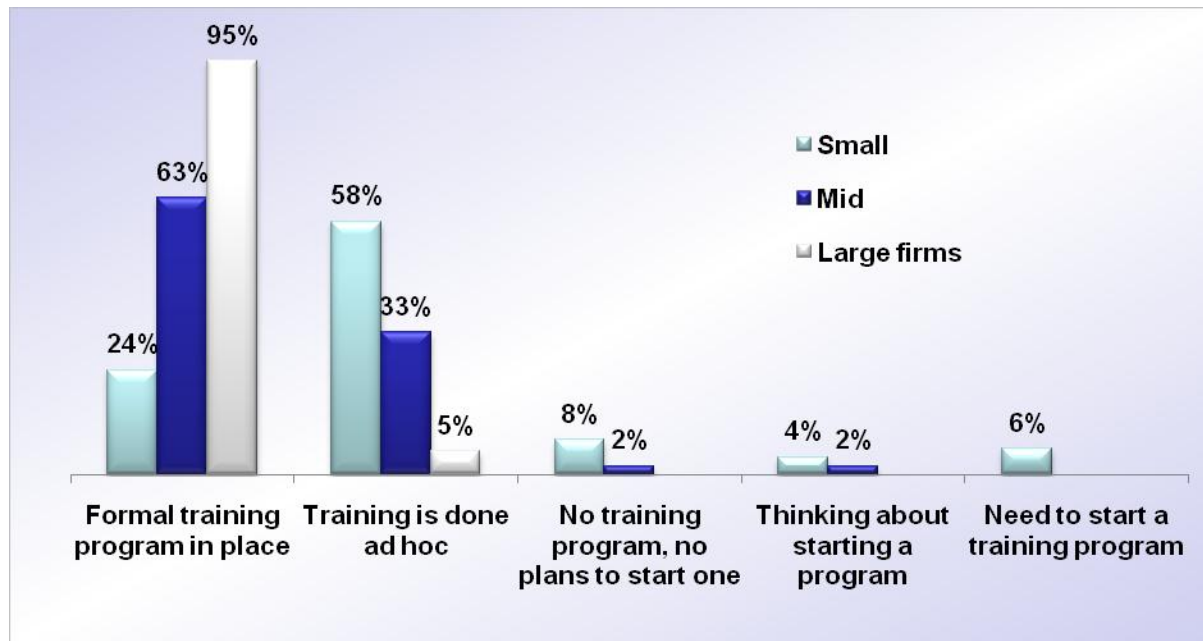


- The majority of firms (92%) report that they train associates, whether it is a formal program or an ad hoc, solutions-based program.
- 4% of firms report no plans to start a training program and another 4% recognize the need to institute one.

4. Does your law firm have an associate training program in place?  
(Total Respondents, n= 140)

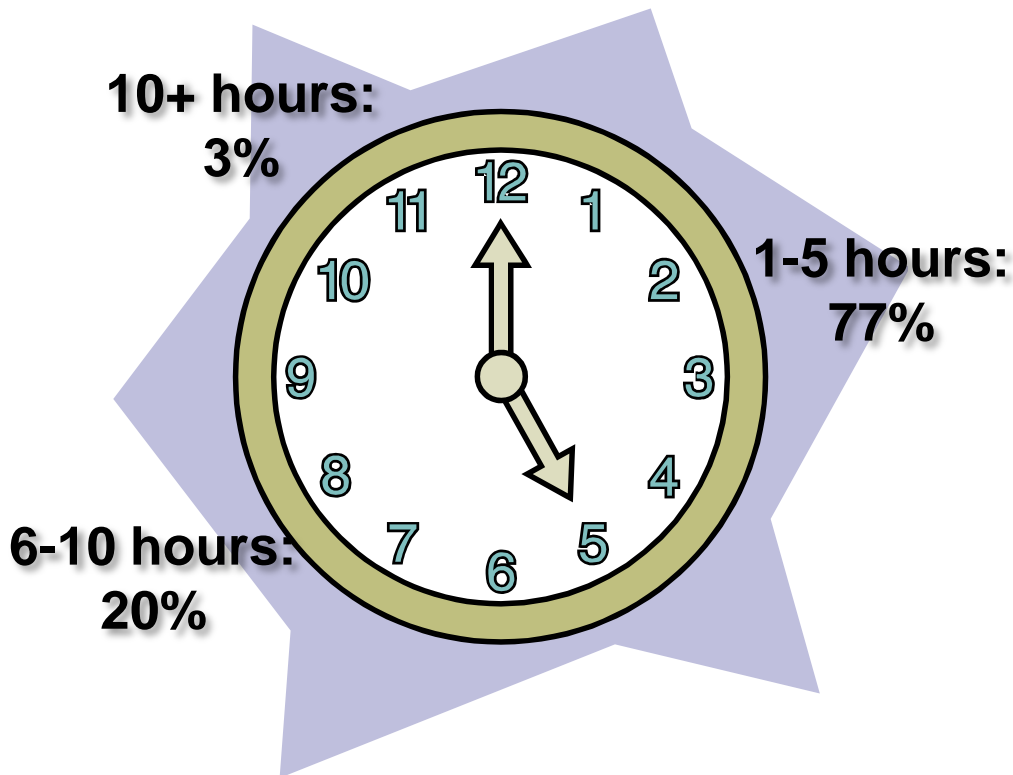
# Associate Training, by Firm Size

- Large to mid-size firms are more likely to have formal associate training programs in place.
- Small firms are most likely not to have training programs in place but recognize the need to start one.



4. Does your law firm have an associate training program in place?  
(Small firms, n=50; Medium firms, n= 52; Large firms, n= 38)

# Associate Training: Hours per Month



- Most firms spend between 1-5 hours per month training associates.
- Mid-size firms are more likely to spend between 1-5 hours training, whereas larger firms will spend more time training, between 6-10 hours.

5. Approximately how many hours a month do associates spend in training programs?  
(n= 116 firms quantifying an amount of time)

# Associate Training: Responsibilities by Title\*



Partners	Prof'l Developers	Senior Associates	Law Librarians
<b>58%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>8%</b>

6. Who is responsible for, and to what degree do they contribute to, your firm's associate training and professional development program?

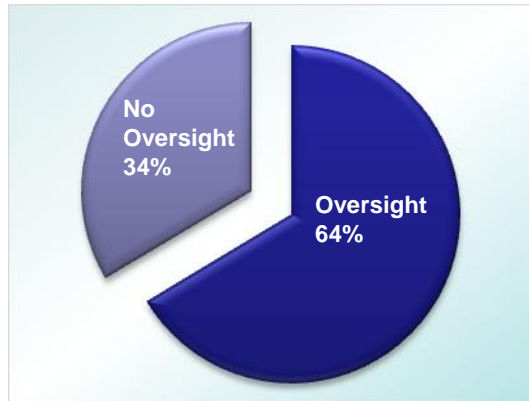
\*Average percentage contribution of each of the listed response options

- Partners hold primary responsibility for associate training, contributing 60% to the overall effort.
- Professional developers and senior associates also play significant roles in the training enterprise, as do a variety of titles both inside and outside the firm.

## “Other” 28%

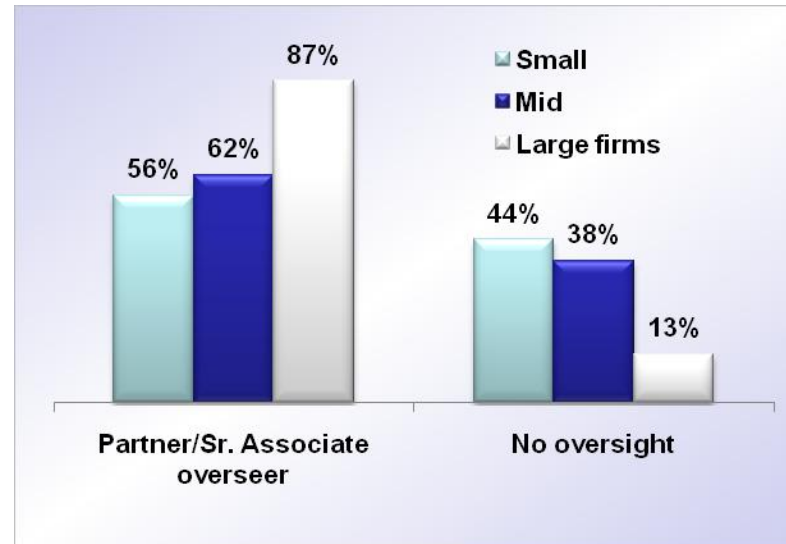
- Administrator
- CLEs
- External trainers / Outside consultants
- HR, IT, Accounting, Records
- Marketing or Business Development
- Paralegals or Assistants
- Technical training on practice-specific software

# Associate Training: Oversight



- Two in three firms report that they have at least one partner or senior associate responsible for overseeing associate training at their firms.

- Large firms are significantly more likely to have a partner or senior associate in place to help oversee the training effort.

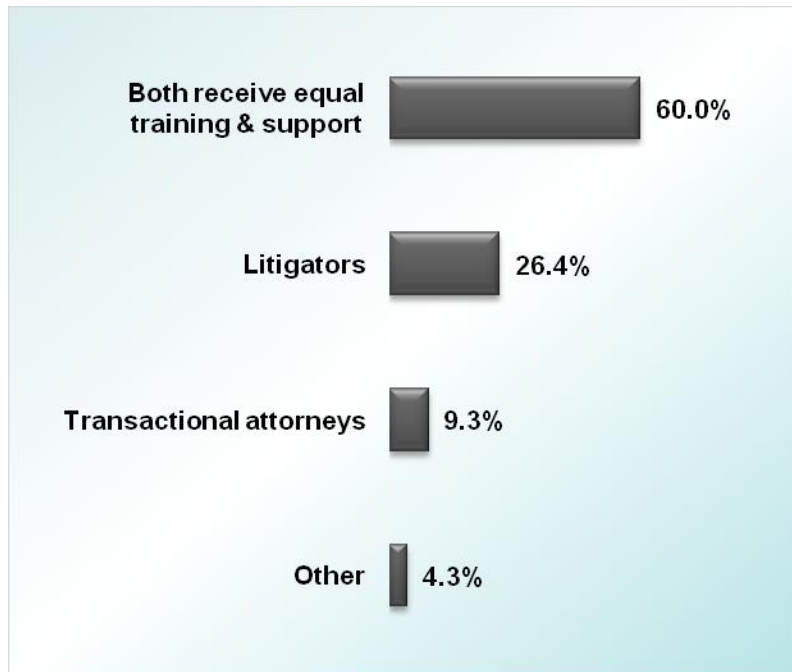


±Significance at the 99% confidence level.

7. Does your firm have a partner or senior associate responsible for overseeing training and professional development?

(Total Respondents, n= 140; Small firms, n=50; Medium firms, n= 52; Large firms, n= 38)

# Who Gets More Support?



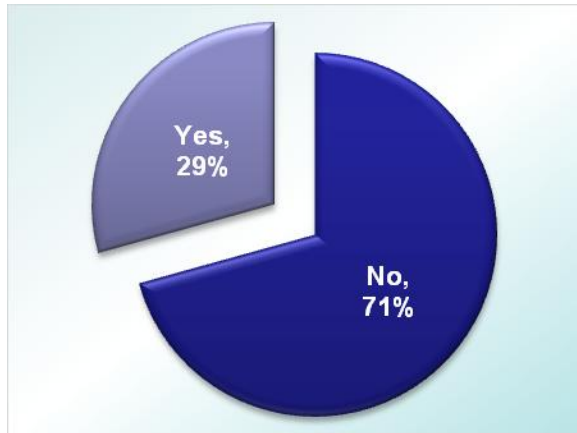
- Just under two-thirds of firms reported that no matter the type of law the associate is practicing, they received the same amount of training and support.
- About 25% of firms report that litigators get more help, which may be more of a factor among firms that specialize in litigation or have a significant number of litigators on staff.

8. Which of the following lawyers in your firm receive more time and resources for training and support?

(Total Respondents, n= 140)



# Associate Training: Client Input



- One in three firms report that they involve clients in associate training at their firms (regardless of firm size).

## How Firms Involve Clients:

- Clients attend and/or speak at firm seminars and professional development programs.
- Associates are placed in secondments with the client.
- Clients make presentations on “hard skills” (e.g., financial covenants from a banker’s perspective) and “soft skills” (e.g., what does a general counsel look for in outside lawyers).
- Firms design training programs geared specifically for particular clients.
- Firms invite clients to training programs where MCLE credit may or may not be offered.
- Clients serve on panels or participate in networking/training events as part of business development initiatives.
- Clients invited to speak about best practices for dealing with clients as well as reporting and billing practices.
- Video calls with clients as presenters.
- Associates shadow other firm partners during sales calls or other client meetings.

9. Does your firm involve clients in associate training programs?

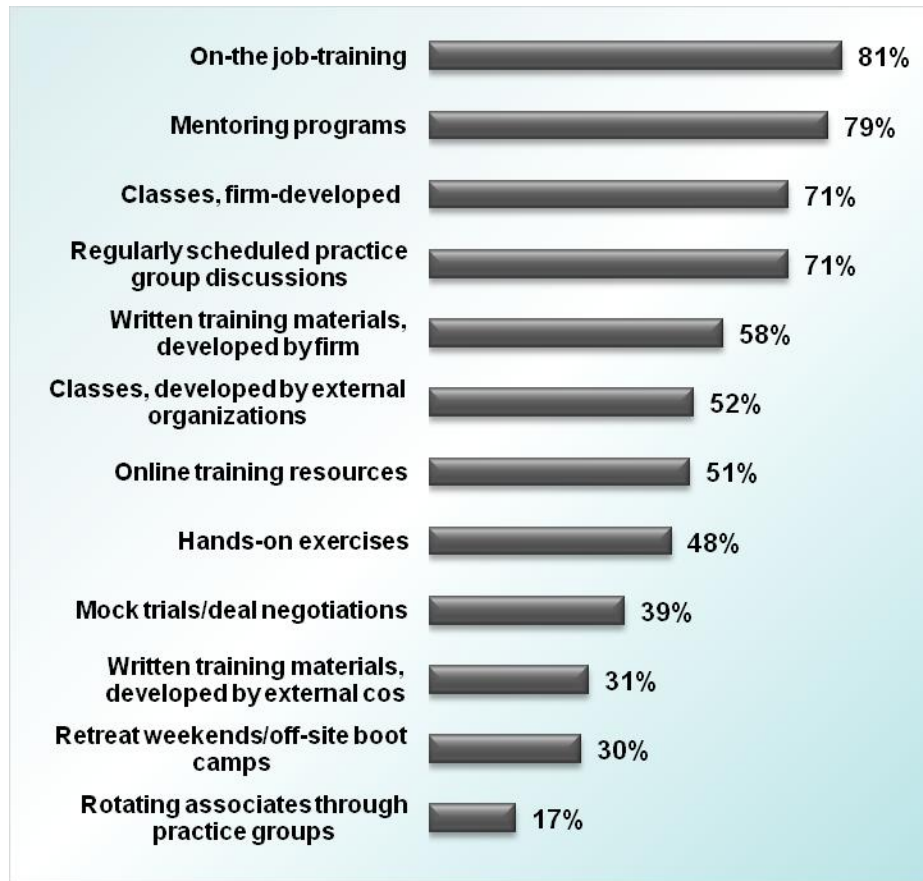
(Total Respondents, n= 140)

9a. Please describe how your firm involves clients in its training programs.

(Q9 - Firms involving clients, n= 41)



# Methods Used to Train Associates



10. What methods does your firm use to train associates? Check all that apply.  
(Total Respondents, n= 140)

- Firms use a variety of methods to train associates, with on-the-job training and mentoring being the most popular methods used by all three firm sizes.
- More than half of the responding firms use online training resources.

## “Other” 9%

- Additional classes at local law school
- Internally developed seminars / workshops
- Leadership Academy
- Live modules developed by firm
- Lunch-and-learns through out the year
- Regularly scheduled firm-wide associate group meetings
- Selling skills training programs
- They are required to get CLE credit to stay licensed
- Vendor demos, one-hour topic presentations

# Methods Used to Train Associates, by Firm Size

Methods by Firm Size	Small	Med.	Large
On-the job-training	80%	81%	84%
Mentoring programs	70%	79%	89%
Classes, firm-developed <sup>(a)</sup>	42%	87%	87%
Regularly scheduled practice group discussions <sup>(a)</sup>	52%	81%	82%
Written training materials, developed by firm <sup>(b)</sup>	30%	67%	82%
Classes, developed by external organizations <sup>(a)</sup>	44%	50%	66%
Online training resources <sup>(b)</sup>	42%	44%	74%
Hands-on exercises	38%	46%	63%
Mock trials/deal negotiations <sup>(c)</sup>	12%	40%	71%
Written training materials, developed by external companies	28%	25%	45%
Retreat weekends/off-site boot camps <sup>(c)</sup>	18%	29%	47%
Rotating associates through practice groups	10%	10%	37%

- Large firms use the listed training methods to a greater degree<sup>±</sup> than small and mid-size firms.
- Large and mid-size firms use training classes and practice group discussions more than small firms (a).
- Large firms are more likely to use online training resources and prepare in-house training materials (b). They may also have more funds available for other training offerings such as off-site meetings and mock trials (c).

<sup>±</sup> Significance at the 95% confidence level or higher.

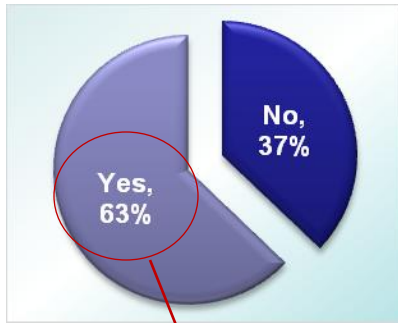
10. What methods does your firm use to train associates? Check all that apply.  
(Small firms, n= 52; Medium firms, n= 50; Large firms, n= 38)

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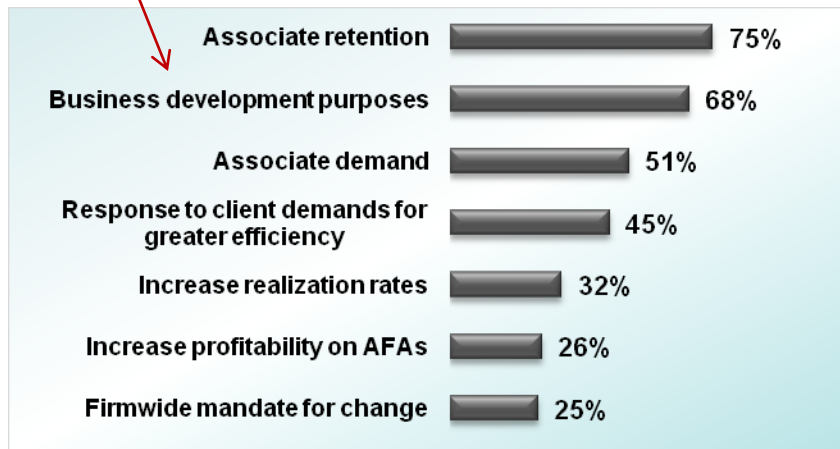


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# Associate Training: Changes to Programs



- Two in three firms report that they implemented new or updated their current associate training program in the past year.
- Three-quarters cite associate retention as the primary reason, more than half report that associate demand account for program changes.



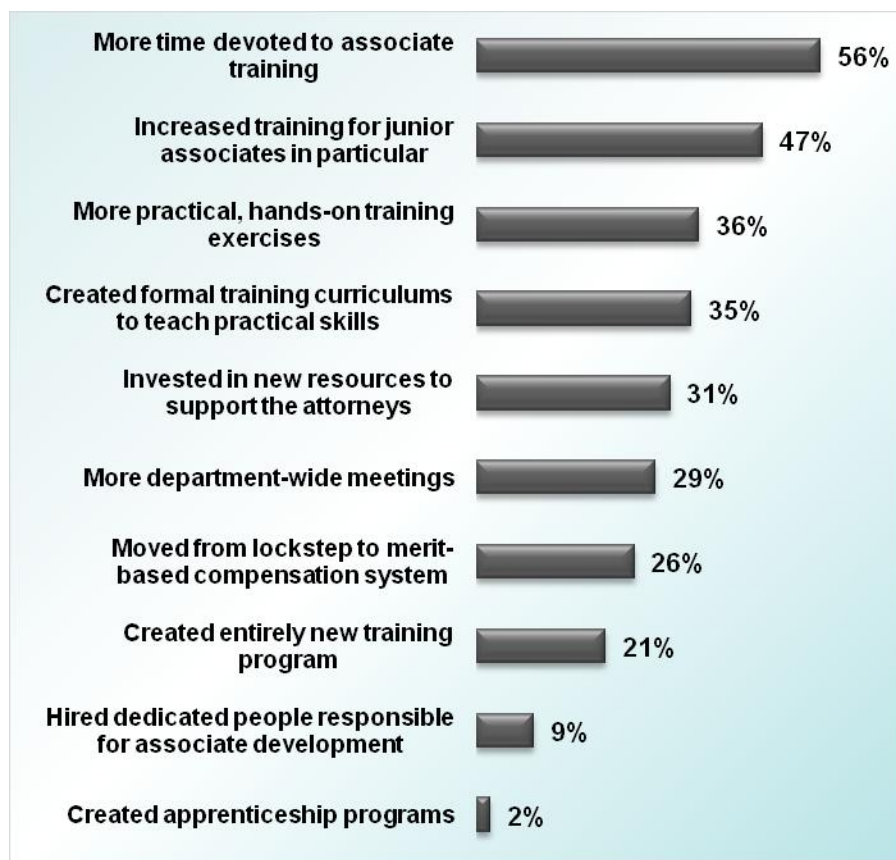
## “Other” 14%

- Better prepared associates
- Continuous quality improvement
- Core competencies
- Culture that stresses associate development
- Increase morale generally; enhance consistent quality throughout firm
- Keep trainings fresh
- Our commitment to professional development
- Program changes every year
- Risk management
- Skill building in needed areas

11. Has your firm updated or implemented any new associate training or professional development initiatives in the past 12 months?  
(Total respondents, n= 140)

12. What are some reasons behind updating or implementing new associate training and professional development initiatives? Check all that apply.  
(Q11 - Those making changes, n= 88)

# How Associate Training Programs Have Changed



- The most significant change to training programs was that firms now devote more time to the task.
- Firms are now more likely to incorporate practical, skills-oriented exercises in their training curricula.

## “Other” 11%

- Emphasis on training at the practice group level has increased
- Expanded mentoring
- Fired non-performers
- More business development coaching
- More specific practice group meetings
- Updated our existing firm-wide and practice group competencies; updated our training to better align with competencies

13. How has your firm changed the methods by which it trains and supports associates in the past 12 months? Check all that apply.

(Q11 - Those making changes, n= 88)

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# Training Program Changes, by Firm Size

Changes by Firm Size	Small	Med.	Large
More time devoted to associate training	52%	63%	50%
Increased training for junior associates in particular <sup>(a)</sup>	26%	51%	57%
More practical, hands-on training exercises	43%	34%	32%
Created formal training curriculums to teach practical skills <sup>(b)</sup>	13%	40%	46%
Invested in new resources to support the attorneys	22%	40%	29%
More department-wide meetings	30%	26%	32%
Moved from lockstep to merit-based compensation system <sup>(c)</sup>	4%	29%	39%
Created entirely new training program	13%	17%	32%
Hired dedicated people responsible for associate development	9%	9%	11%
Created apprenticeship programs	0%	3%	4%

- Large and medium size are significantly more likely than smaller firms to bump up training for junior associates (a), create practical skills training (b) and move from lockstep to merit-based compensation systems (c).
- A large portion of mid-size firms invested in new resources to support attorneys.

± Significance at the 95% confidence level or higher.

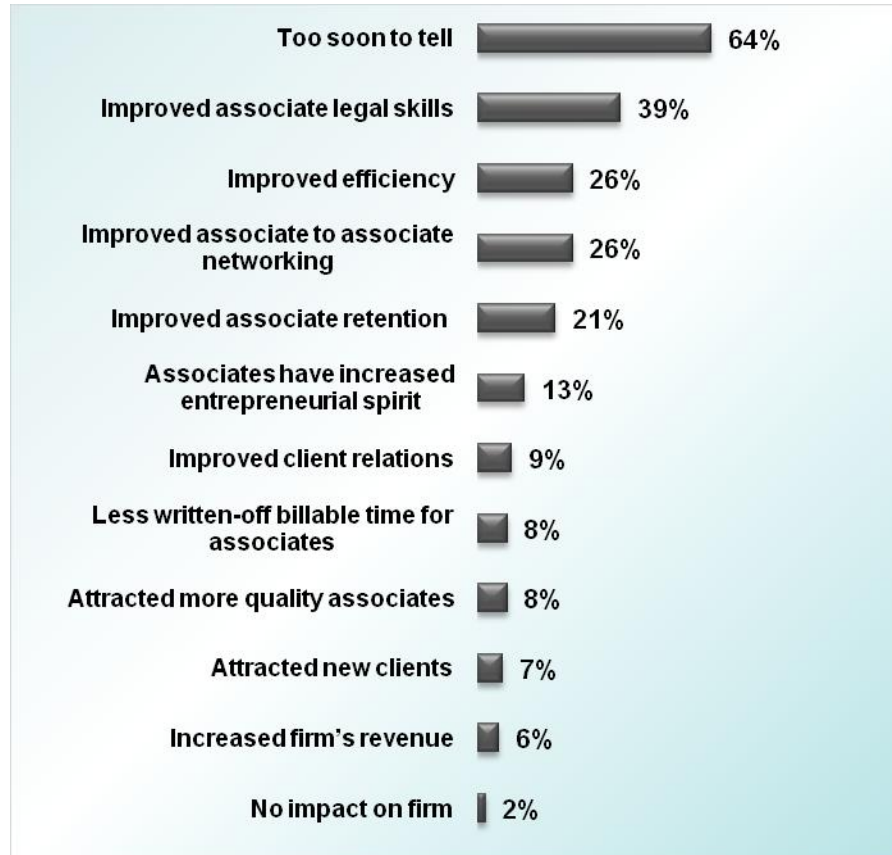
13. How has your firm changed the methods by which it trains and supports associates in the past 12 months? Check all that apply.

(Q11 - Those making changes. Small, n= 23; Medium, n= 35; Large firms, n= 28)





# Changes in Training Programs – Impact to Firm



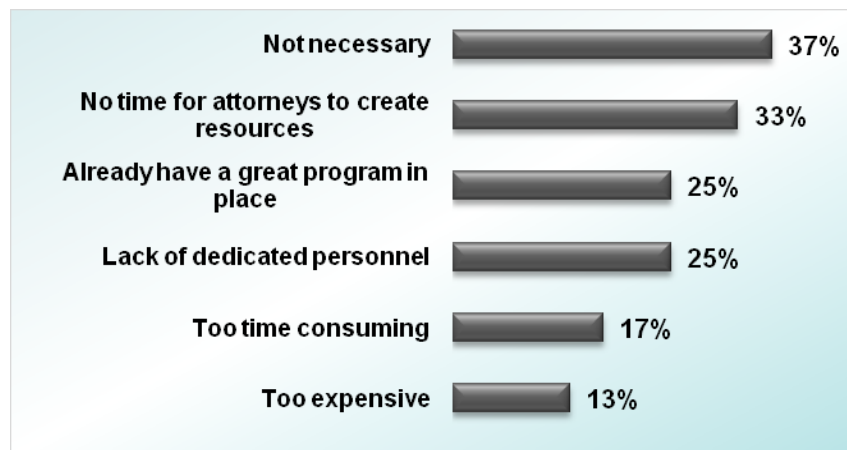
- Two thirds report that although they have made changes to their associate training programs, it is too soon to tell if the changes have had any impact on the firm as a whole.
- Still, a quarter or more report improved legal skills, networking and overall efficiencies.
- Small firms were the most likely to report that their associates have an increased entrepreneurial spirit, which may be a function of the small firm structure.

14. How have these changes impacted your firm's business? Choose all that apply.  
(Q11 - Those making changes, n= 88)

# Associate Training: No Program Changes

- One in three firms report not having implemented a new program or updated their current associate training program in the past year.
- One-third of firms (especially small firms) report that either they do not have the resources available to implement changes or that changes to their programs are unnecessary.
- Large firms are more likely to cite that they have a “great program in place” than small or mid-size firms.

## Why Not?



15. Why hasn't your firm updated or implemented any new associate training or professional development initiatives?

(Q11 - Those not making changes. n= 47)

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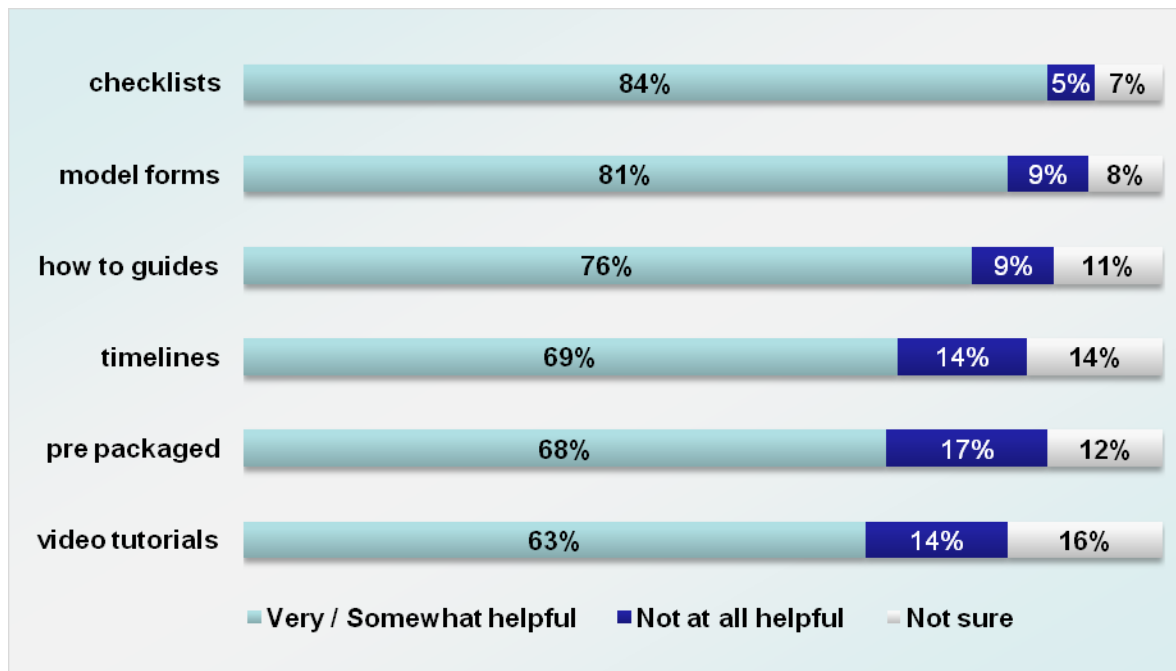


## “Other” 23%

- The current program has the capacity to incorporate new programs. It is always evolving.
- Time spent teaching is not billable so not valued.
- We are currently evaluating the existing program, trying to decide whether changes are necessary/desired.
- We are too small to justify the dedicated time, given the small numbers of new associates with us at any one time.
- We are working on one now.
- We updated two years ago; we're constantly reevaluating, just haven't implemented anything major in last 12 months.

# Helpfulness of Proposed Training Methods

- 75% or more of firms find how-to guides, model forms and checklists very helpful as training support materials.
- About two-thirds find the other methods helpful as well.



16. Please tell us the degree to which each of the following might be helpful in your firm's efforts to support and train your associates.

(Total respondents, n= 140)

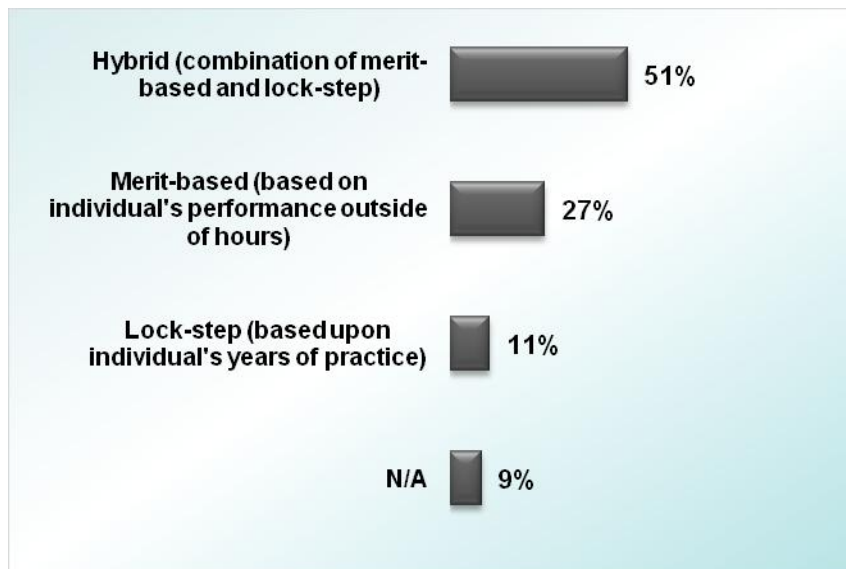
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# Associate Compensation

- More than half of firms report using a hybrid associate compensation system, combining traditional lockstep with merit-based compensation.
- A lockstep-only system trails far behind purely merit-based systems among firms.



17. What method is currently used in associate compensation and advancement?

(Total respondents, n= 140)

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- Large firms are slightly<sup>±</sup> more likely to have purely lockstep associate compensation programs than small and medium size firms.

<sup>±</sup> Significance at the 90% confidence level or higher.

## “Other” 2%

- *Salary, Bonuses based on quality and quantity of work, and origination bonuses based on new business brought in to the firm.*

# Changes to Evaluation of Associate Performance

## Sample responses:

- Added a merit based component.
- Competency-based.
- Continuing attention to client development.
- Evaluation now tied to firm-wide competencies.
- Have a list of specific benchmarks.
- In the transactions practice areas, there is less to evaluate.
- Measured against competency model.
- Most hours regardless of quality of the work or efficiency or anything else.
- Moved from lock-step to performance based.
- Not formally, although the economic climate and client needs have certainly colored the lens through which associate performance is viewed.
- Our evaluation process is primarily the same. We have requested that associates maintain and review their business development plans with their mentors and marketing 1-2 times a year.
- Probably been less willing to extend the time it takes for an associate to reach an acceptable level of performance, and so shortened the time that a sub-par performing associate stays at the firm.

- Slight changes to evaluation form and new process for apprenticeship programs.
- Standards have been tighter and more of an effort to get non-performing associates to move on.
- We added a self-evaluation component to the associate evaluation process, and we introduced a draft set of firm-wide and departmental competencies for associates.
- We have gone from 2 evaluations per year to one formal evaluation with one informal evaluation.
- Increased emphasis on quality of work and client development activities with less focus strictly on the basis of productivity i.e. billable hours.
- Moved to hybrid evaluation process and put associates into 3 levels.
- Firm moved to a global review process for all associates, so we are using a global review form and benchmarks.

18. How have you changed how you evaluate your associates' performance in the past 12 mos.?

(Total respondents, those answering Q18, n= 47)

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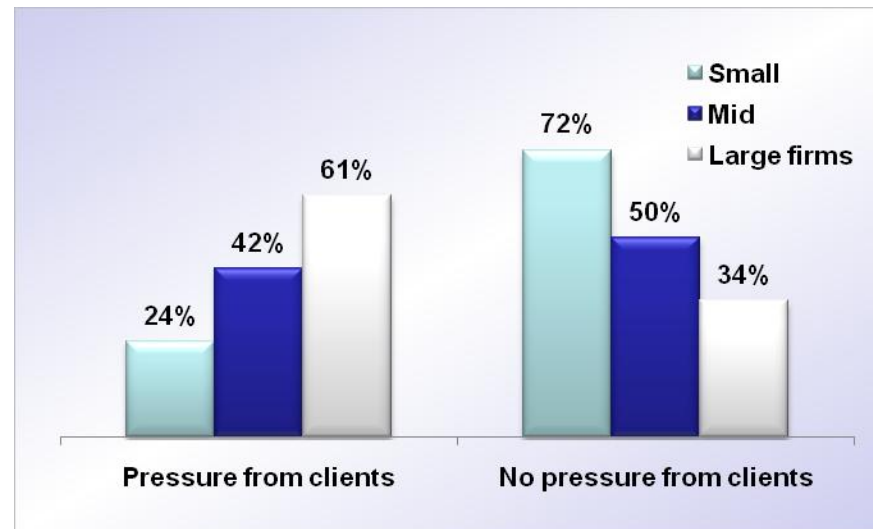
# Client Pressure to Exclude Associates



- Two out of five law firms admit that they receive pressure from external clients to exclude their junior associates from billing hours on their matters.
- Large and medium size firms feel this pressure at a far greater rate than small firms.

19. Has your firm experienced pressure from clients to exclude junior associates billing hours on their matters?

(Total respondents, n= 140)



± Significance at the 95% confidence level or higher.

# Appendix – Questionnaire



1. Which of the following describes your job responsibility or title?

- Lawyer, Partner
- Lawyer, Associate
- Lawyer, Of Counsel
- Law Librarian
- Business Development
- Professional Development
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2. How many lawyers are in your law firm?

- 1-24
- 25-50
- 51-100
- 101-249
- 250-499
- 500-999
- 1,000+

3. In which state is your law firm's largest office? (state with the most headcount)

4. Does your law firm have an associate training program in place?

- Yes, a formal training program is in place
- Associate training is done on an ad hoc basis
- The firm is thinking about starting a training program
- We have no training program, but we see a need to start one
- No training program, no plans to start one

5. Approximately how many hours a month do associates spend in training programs?

- Not sure
- None
- 1-5 hours
- 6-10 hours
- Over 10 hours

6. Who is responsible for, and to what degree do they contribute to, your firm's associate training and professional development program? (percentages should equal 100%)

Percentage

- Partners
- Senior Associates
- Law Librarians
- Professional Development
- Other: (please indicate)

7. Does your firm have a partner or senior associate responsible for overseeing training and professional development?

- Yes
- No

8. Which of the following lawyers in your firm receive more time and resources for training and support?

- Litigators
- Transactional attorneys
- Both receive equal training & support
- Other:

9. Does your firm involve clients in associate training programs?

- Yes GO TO 9a
- No Skip to 10

9a. Please describe how your firm involves clients in its training programs.

\_\_\_\_\_



10. What methods does your firm use to train associates? Check all that apply.

- Classes, firm-developed
- Classes, developed by external organizations
- Regularly scheduled practice group discussions
- Retreat weekends/off-site boot camps
- Mock trials/deal negotiations
- Rotating associates through practice groups
- Mentoring programs
- Hands-on exercises
- On-the job- training (aka Learn by fire)
- Written training materials, developed by external companies
- Written training materials, developed by firm
- Online training resources
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

11. Has your firm updated or implemented any new associate training or professional development initiatives in the past 12 months?

- Yes Skip to question #12
- No Skip to question #15

12. What are some reasons behind updating or implementing new associate training and professional development initiatives? Check all that apply.

- Response to client demands for greater efficiency
- Business development purposes
- Associate demand
- Associate retention
- Increase realization rates
- Increase profitability on alternative fee arrangements
- Firmwide mandate for change in the way associate support is handled (e.g. fewer associates but closer mentoring)
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

13. How has your firm changed the methods by which it trains and supports associates in the past 12 months? Check all that apply.

- More time devoted to associate training
- Less time devoted to associate training
- Created formal training curriculums to teach practical skills
- Hired dedicated people responsible for associate development
- Increased training for junior associates in particular
- More practical, hands-on training exercises
- Created apprenticeship programs
- More department-wide meetings
- Invested in new resources to support the attorneys
- Moved from lockstep to merit-based compensation system
- Created entirely new training program
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

14. How have these changes impacted your firm's business? Choose all that apply.

- Less written-off billable time for associates
- Improved efficiency
- Improved client relations
- Improved associate to associate networking
- Attracted new clients
- Attracted more quality associates
- Improved associate retention
- Associates have increased entrepreneurial spirit
- Improved associate legal skills
- Increased firm's revenue
- Too soon to tell
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- No impact

Jump to question #16



15. Why hasn't your firm updated or implemented any new associate training or professional development initiatives?

- Too expensive
- We already have a great program in place
- Too time consuming
- Attorneys don't have time to create the required resources
- Lack of dedicated personnel
- Not necessary
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

16. Please tell us the degree to which each of the following might be helpful in your firm's efforts to support and train your associates.

*Very helpful, Somewhat helpful, Not at all helpful, Unsure*

- Pre-packaged curriculums
- Model forms and documents
- Checklists
- Timelines
- Video tutorials
- How-to guides by practice area

17. What method is currently used in associate compensation and advancement?

- Merit-based (based on individual's performance outside of hours)
- Lock-step (based upon individual's years of practice)
- Hybrid (combination of merit-based and lock-step)
- Other (please specify):
- Unsure

18. Have you changed how you evaluate your associates' performance in the past 12 months? How so?

19. Has your firm experienced pressure from clients to exclude junior associates billing hours on their matters?

- Yes
- No

20. Finally, do you feel your associate training program sets you apart from your competitors? How so?

