

Designing a Lawyer Transition Framework

To ensure your firm's growth and long-term survival, invest in your human capital: they are the firm's ambassadors and its future.

By Juhi Garg and Sean Larkan

Clients and partners alike think of a firm's senior associates in terms of a hierarchy of skill and deliverables. Excellent client service is, of course, the first rung on the ladder, followed by specialist knowledge, strategic business insights, and finally, thought leadership in their practice area or industry. This development arc also happens to parallel the transition from senior associate to practice group leader or even managing partner.

Law firms (especially those in India) must realize that this transition will not happen naturally or by accident. They must provide lawyers with structured guidance and consistent mentoring throughout this process, customized to the firm's culture, expectations, client requirements and market dynamics. What they need, specifically, is a lawyer transition framework.

A lawyer transition framework can be broken into two stages: building a base of market knowledge and firm expectations, followed by the establishment and development of key business skills and concepts.

Stage One: Ensure your lawyers fully understand and can act on:

- your values and cultural attributes
- your services and markets, today and tomorrow
- your methods of delivering those services
- your understanding of your markets
- your lawyers' position and reputation within those markets
- your communications and presentation to the market, and
- your key partner attributes

Stage Two: Establish your lawyers' grasp of fundamental concepts and critical skills (specific to your firm's goal and markets:

- business development

- client communication
- effective client service
- teamwork and management
- the firm brand
- financial management
- knowledge management
- leadership, and
- ensuring the lawyer's contribution to the firm

The goal of a lawyer transition framework is twofold: not only to cultivate senior associates, but also to encourage (and sometimes push) better transitions among current partners who have yet to fully tap their potential. Critical to the success of this effort is active management, leader commitment, performance assessment, and sophisticated analysis and feedback.

What are the benefits of a lawyer development framework?

- engagement of key lawyers ("say," "stay" and "strive") and resulting improvement in recruitment, development and retention
- formalized partner succession through a structured development program
- successful differentiation of the firm through lawyers' unique skills
- enhanced client service and stronger long-term relationships
- powerfully reinforced brand
- stronger firm culture, and
- better assets for the future of the firm

To ensure your firm's growth and long-term survival, invest in your human capital: they are the firm's ambassadors and its future. The sooner you invest, the sooner you reap.

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