



Managing For Success:
Workforce Alignment Can Make The Difference

A substantial and rapidly expanding body of evidence points to a strong connection between how a law firm manages its people and its economic success. Utilizing a concept known as workforce alignment, some firms are producing greater client value simply by having the *right people* in the *right places* doing the *right things*.

Manage Your People, Please Your Clients

Law firm success comes from delivering value to your clients. And the ability to deliver that value comes from understanding what clients want, and then knowing how to manage partners, associates, paralegals and support staff to produce that value — in other words, workforce alignment.

Groundbreaking research conducted by Dr. Christopher Collins of Cornell University's Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies reveals that workforce alignment leads to:

- Increased profits
- Sales growth
- Better client satisfaction

The results of this study offer three key takeaways for those interested in improving law firm performance:

1. Look for the right fit. An aligned workforce starts with what is called the “person-future fit.” Instead of simply hiring someone for his or her ability to fill a position and provide immediate results, look to hire staff with exceptional talent who can add value to the firm in the long run.

2. Implement the right systems. In a small law firm, it's easy to "manage" by constantly looking over the shoulders of associates and legal staff. Instead, developing formal management systems or providing employees the opportunity to manage themselves appears to be a much more effective human resource strategy.

3. Utilize the right motivators. Legal practice employees who develop a sense of passion for the firm's mission and vision are more likely to succeed than those who favor work or money as motivators.

Aligning Your Firm's Workforce

So, how do you get the right people working together on the right things at your firm?

Find exceptional talent. In his highly acclaimed book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins counsels that businesses must decide "first who ... then what." Collins explains, "First, get the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) before you figure out where to drive it." Law firms striving to be great should acknowledge that determining *who* should become part of the organization comes before all else. For example:

- Agree to recruit and retain only the best.
- Develop a profile of characteristics that accurately describe the "right" people for your firm. Make sure it is endorsed by a majority of partners and then make this set of agreed-upon values non-negotiable.
- Establish a clear, equitable policy so that firm leadership can rigorously evaluate people against the profile.

Establish formal HR processes. Formal HR processes — things as basic as employee handbooks and an established performance management process — help create a positive work environment where expectations are understood and met, and people constantly strive for both personal and professional success. All HR processes should ensure that:

- Partners, associates and staff members clearly know what they are supposed to do, how to do it and why they should do it.
- Feedback on performance is continuous, frequent and geared to specific performance criteria.
- Advancement in the firm and compensation are closely tied to attainment of these clearly articulated criteria.

Employ solid motivation and retention practices. While compensation (salary and bonuses) is certainly a powerful tool for directing and managing behavior, research clearly shows that non-monetary rewards are equally effective motivators in the law firm. In addition to offering competitive salaries, your firm should:

- Consistently look for ways to reward and praise lawyers and staff with incentives designed to encourage behavior that furthers your firm's stated mission.
- Clearly and consistently demonstrate appreciation for efforts made and work well done, praising liberally and openly.
- Value and support high morale and quality of life, both within and outside the practice.

Herd Those Cats

Managing legal staff is no doubt a challenge. In fact, it has often been likened to "herding cats." But, by using the concepts of workforce alignment, your firm may just find that the herding is a little easier.

With real-world experience in legal practices like yours, our professionals can help your firm maximize value. Call today to find out more.