

## Getting the Ducks in Line

“So now what do we do, Annabelle?” asked ace hiring partner Sherwood Corrigan, visibly upset.

“Relax, Sherwood. Don’t be so visibly upset, it’s not the end of the world.”

“Maybe not, but it’s embarrassing, our New York office turning that candidate down after we’d made him an offer in Chicago. How do we get out of this one?”

“Well, we could have the candidate interview in our DC office and take the best two out of three.”

“Very funny, Annabelle.”

“Maybe this is a blessing in disguise, Sherwood. It’s a signal that we need to get our ducks in line. More than half of our lawyers are outside the main office now, so we’ve got to start thinking more about how we’re going to recruit on a national basis.”

“Okay, let’s do it. Let’s start with how to avoid the situation that we’re in right now.”

“Well, there are two aspects to the problem. One’s easily solved and one’s not nearly so easy.”

“Do you want to spell that out a little, Annabelle?”

“Sure. Part of the problem is that we didn’t know what was going on in our offices. That’s a systems problem. If we had a unified way of keeping track of who is going through the process in each of our

offices, at least we’d know when we were about to make contrary decisions.”

“Our software system really is behind the times, isn’t it? We probably ought to invest in getting something that meets our current needs. It may cost us something now, but it’s worth it in the long run.

What’s the second aspect of the problem?”

“We don’t have the same hiring standards in all of our offices.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Well, if we had the same standards, we wouldn’t be making an offer to a candidate in one office and rejecting him in another.”

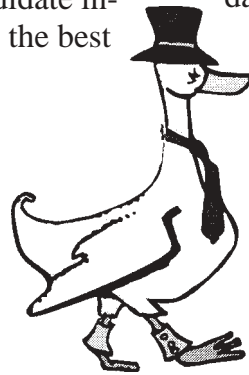
“Maybe, and maybe not, Annabelle. Let’s take an example. Suppose that the Chicago office wants to hire 20 summer associates and the New York office wants to hire 10. To make it simple, let’s assume that each office expects to attract one

of three students to whom it makes offers. They each interview the same 150 people and conclude that 100 of them meet the firm’s standards. The Chicago office is going to make offers to 60 of those students and the New York office will make only 30. So even though the standards are the same, at least 30 students who receive offers from Chicago will be turned down by New York.”

“So maybe there’s no problem at all, Sherwood. You solved it.”

“I wish that were the case, Annabelle.

(con’t pg. 4)



## Carol's Column

*This column draws on Carol Kanarek's unique perspective as an advisor to law students and consultant to large law firms. Carol can be reached at 212-371-0967 or [ckanarek@aol.com](mailto:ckanarek@aol.com).*

As the current slowdown in the business practice groups of most major U.S. law firms nears the two-and-half-year mark, some firms are starting to make the same costly lateral hiring mistakes they made during the recession of the early nineties. Topping the list of errors is hubris in recruiting: firing perfectly satisfactory—and reasonably satisfied—associate workhorses and replacing them with highly credentialed prima donnas who will bolt the instant the economy revives. In the meantime, these new associates sow their seeds of discontent by making it very clear that they consider most of your firm's work to be beneath them, and writing nasty comments in the American Lawyer Survey of Mid-level Associates (thereby hindering your entry-level and lateral recruiting efforts for years to come).

A related mistake is what I refer to as “magical thinking”: paying far too much for senior lateral associates or service partners from firms that have clients you covet, in the mistaken notion that those clients will be so impressed by the personnel move that they will send some significant business your way. A lawyer with potentially portable clients almost always has a well thought out business development plan that he or she is eager to share with you during the recruiting process.

Here are a few suggestions to bear in mind as you recruit in a buyer's market:

- Be wary of any potential recruit who lacks a coherent reason for wanting to join your firm.
- Don't leave an offer open for more than ten days unless there is a compelling reason to do so. A candidate who is unable to give you a clear yes or no in that time period is usually under pressure to leave his or her current firm, but would prefer not to take your offer unless something “better” fails to materialize.
- Negotiate longer guarantee periods with search firms, so that you will get all or part of your money back if the new lawyer does not prove to be a good match for your firm.

## Are You Serious?

*I firmly believe that recruiting and managing lawyers effectively requires a (sick?) sense of humor. This space is reserved for humor. Please feel free to send in your contributions.*

Though normally this column is restricted to humor in a law firm setting, this give and take between Qantas pilots and mechanics sounded to me as if it could have taken place in a law firm. Here are some actual logged maintenance complaints and problems submitted by QANTAS pilots and the solution recorded by maintenance engineers. (By the way, Qantas is the only major airline that has never had an accident.)

P = The problem logged by the pilot.

S = The solution and action taken by the engineers.

P: Left inside main tire almost needs replacement.

S: Almost replaced left inside main tire.

P: Something loose in cockpit.

S: Something tightened in cockpit.

P: Dead bugs on windshield.

S: Live bugs on back-order.

P: Autopilot in altitude-hold mode produces a 200 fpm descent.

S: Cannot reproduce problem on ground.

P: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.

S: Evidence removed.

P: DME volume unbelievably loud.

S: DME volume set to more believable level.

P: Friction locks cause throttle levers to stick.

S: That's what they're there for.

P: Suspected crack in windshield.

S: Suspect you're right.

P: Number 3 engine missing.

S: Engine found on right wing after brief search.

P: Aircraft handles funny.

S: Aircraft warned to straighten up, fly right, and be serious.

P: Target radar hums.

S: Reprogrammed target radar with words.

P: Mouse in cockpit.

S: Cat installed.

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## The Longer View

*Most people involved with recruiting and managing lawyers feel they have enough to do dealing with what's on their plate today. This column will try to stimulate you to view things on a longer continuum, and to look to the future.*

Associates are interested in their careers, but think that very few large law firms are. If you can convince your associates that you are interested in their careers you will have a better chance both of attracting quality associates and of retaining them once they get there.

Appoint a career development partner in each practice area who is responsible for helping to plan the career development of each associate. This partner should conduct periodic one-on-one meetings with associates in order to assess their career plan and whether progress is being made toward achieving that plan. This effort will require a significant amount of time, but is worth it in the long run. For it to work, your career development partner will need considerable staff support.

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## Ask Arnie

*Please submit your questions about recruitment or life. The swami will reply.*

*How can we get our associates to participate more in recruitment?*

Various firms have adopted methods of rewarding associates who participate in recruitment, either monetarily or with credit toward billable hours requirements. There may be non-economic ways of getting greater participation, as well. Make sure that your associates hear about their recruitment efforts in the review and evaluation process, so that they know that those efforts are appreciated and rewarded by the firm. Don't use email to try to get people involved in recruitment. It is too easy to ignore an email. Instead, stop into the associate's office or phone the associate. Encourage your senior associates to take summer associates along to work-related events.



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## clientSell

*This crassly commercial section ballyhoos a consulting service, which could prove very useful to you (and, of course, profitable to me). Here's this issue's suggestion. Call (847) 864-7657 or e-mail [arnie@kanterprofessional.com](mailto:arnie@kanterprofessional.com) if you're interested. Additional consulting services can be found on my website at [www.kanterprofessional.com](http://www.kanterprofessional.com)*

In the 1980s, large law firms recognized the need to focus outwardly — on clients — meeting client needs and providing quality services. While this was an important and necessary step, many firms did this to the exclusion of recognizing the importance of an internal focus on the needs and desires of their lawyers.

Increasingly, firms are recognizing the importance of retaining their own lawyers — partners and associates — by focusing more on their needs. For some firms, this is taking the form of creation of an associates committee to help focus on these internal needs. I have advised many law firms on how to achieve this internal focus, without losing their client orientation. My experience in this area may allow you to avoid many of the pitfalls that firms have encountered in trying to re-establish an appropriate balance.

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## Idea of the Quarter

For most hiring committee members, the day they spend interviewing on campus at a law school is the only time they spend at that school during the year. Encourage your on-campus interviewers to allocate another half day to spend at each law school at which they interview to show their faces around the law school. Included in that day might be a visit to the career development office, and to key faculty members, and even a presentation at a class or to the law school population generally. Interviewers might end the half day by taking last year's summer associates or next year's summer associates out for a drink and/or dinner.

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Unfortunately, my analysis was theoretical. I took a look at the actual record and comments about the student we're discussing and there's no way the New York office should have made an offer to him. So, while in theory we might not have had a standards problem, in practice we do."

"Oh, sorry to hear that. What do you think we should do about that?"

"Maybe we need to establish some sort of central control over who the firm makes offers to."

"Trouble with that is that it will slow the offer process down considerably and it's important that we make our offer decisions promptly in the fall, if we're going to compete successfully."

"It needn't necessarily slow it down. If we have the right type of software system we all ought to have immediate access to the information we need and the central check could sign off very quickly, on line. We ought to couple that with a better effort to let all of our offices understand the hiring criteria we're applying."

"Maybe we need to reconstitute our hiring committee, too, Sherwood."

"Why do you suggest that?"

"Well, the one we have now is way too large. When you count everyone from each office there are well over twenty. That's much too big a group to function as a firm hiring committee."

"You're probably right, Annabelle. Maybe we need a two-tier system, a firmwide hiring committee and separate committees within each of the offices. We'd need to sort out the functions of each, though."

"That shouldn't be too tough. The central committee should make hiring policy. They are responsible for the strategy we employ, the standards we apply, the schools we recruit at—the big picture things. The local hiring committees are responsible for implementing the strategy within their offices."

"That sounds pretty good, Annabelle. But aren't we making it a bit too parochial, putting too much of the emphasis at the local level?"

"I don't think so, Sherwood. Tip O'Neill once said that all politics is local. That's pretty much true of recruitment, too. Anyway, you're forgetting about the role of law school teams."

"That's true. Our law school teams cut across office lines and, if we keep those intact, that will

give our recruitment a national flavor. How do you think our offices could help one another more?"

"For one thing, we could share information and experiences much better. I'm sure that each of our offices is doing things in its recruitment efforts that would be great ideas for other offices, if they only knew about them."

"Well, our central hiring committee will have representatives from each office, Annabelle. We could make them responsible for learning what's going on in their offices and sharing it with the other members of the committee."

"It would also help if everyone who is heavily involved in recruitment—at least all of the on-campus interviewers—were familiar with all of our offices. That would allow them to at least give some general information about the offices when students have questions."

"You're right, we should do better on that, Annabelle. It doesn't do much for the notion of our being a national law firm when our lawyers can't tell students anything about what's going on outside of their own office."

"Especially since many of the students know a lot about the other offices themselves, just from looking at our website. Another thing that would help us in recruiting is for all of the offices to stop hurting each other in recruiting."

"How do they do that?"

"A lot of it is innocent, or meant in good fun, but some of it isn't. I've heard many stories about people in our branch offices telling candidates that they wouldn't be caught dead in the main office, but life was great in their small office. Similarly, I know that lawyers in our main office feel that that's where the action is and wind up pooh-poohing the work in other offices."

"Well, we've certainly got to put a stop to that. Any other areas that could use attention in making this a more unified firm recruitment operation?"

"Oh, heavens yes, Sherwood. We haven't talked at all about the summer program or the administration of our recruitment efforts, but Rome wasn't built in a day. If we got started on the things we've spoken about we'd be moving in the right direction towards getting our ducks in line. So, shall we get started?"

"Quack."