

Legal Jobs You've Never Heard of Before

Taking a page from the corporate world, law firms are adding a variety of new positions to help their lawyers and staff, to benefit their own operations, and to improve their relationships with clients.

By Steven A. Meyerowitz

Jeannine M. Rupp has a great title — Director of Professional and Personal Life Integration — and a great job. Using her recruiting and human resources background, as well as the master's of science degree in organizational and social psychology that she recently earned from the London School of Economics, she helps her employer deal with “work/life balance” issues on a daily basis. That is important in today's world, given the various significant personal problems tugging at workers — from child care concerns, to their need to help their aging and ailing parents, to their desire for more flexibility at work.

What's unusual about Rupp's position, however, is that she doesn't work for a typical Fortune 500 company. Rather, she is employed by a law firm — Kirkpatrick & Lockhart Nicholson Graham, LLP.

A CULTURAL CHANGE

For quite some time in the profession, the typical law firm consisted of

Steven A. Meyerowitz is a lawyer and president of Meyerowitz Communications Inc., a law firm marketing communications consulting company. Meyerowitz specializes in helping lawyers write, produce and place their bylined articles, newsletters, brochures, and other marketing materials, and in integrating publications into a firm's overall marketing program. Based in Northport, NY, he may be reached at SMeyerow@optonline.net.

lawyers, legal secretaries, and perhaps a receptionist at the front door who was also in charge of answering the phone. Many firms, as the complexities of their practices grew, added accountants or other employees with financial responsibilities to their staffs. The use of computers led to the addition of computer specialists as part of a law firm's Information Technology department. Marketing and client development personnel began to blossom in the 1980s and 1990s.

But Kirkpatrick & Lockhart's addition of Jeannine Rupp — and of Carl Cooper as the firm's Chief Diversity Officer, who is charged with working with firm management and other firm personnel to design and implement an agenda that promotes, achieves, and maintains a diverse workplace — are a different type of addition altogether. The firm added these two senior positions in a proactive effort to improve the working lives of the firm's lawyers and other employees, with an expectation that doing so would enhance the delivery of legal services to clients.

Other firms are taking similar action. For example, Duane Morris, LLP, has a Chief Operating Officer, a Tax Accounting Director, a Director of Office Services, a Chief Information Officer, and a Director of Real Estate and Facilities. It also has a Manager of Training and Professional Development, a Manager of Credit and Collections, a Business Research Manager in its library, and a Lateral Partner Client Intake Coordinator in the records department. Not to mention a Manager of Ancillary Businesses. All of these positions at Duane Morris go beyond the staff positions that traditionally have directly serviced lawyers or clients.

A GROWING TREND

As the Director of Recruitment for Wisnik Career Enterprises, Inc., in New York City, Jennifer Johnson not only sees this trend, but is also an active participant. Johnson has noticed that some of the new law firm jobs are focused outward, including marketing and client-relations directors. Others are focused on taking care of business inside a law firm.

Johnson points out that some firms are hiring “client analysis people” — employees who do an analysis of a firm's top 100 clients and their businesses. These staff members conduct both qualitative and quantitative research on emerging business trends in an effort to determine “what the next thing is that will be hot.” Significantly, these positions are generally available only for candidates holding a master's degree in business administration.

Marketing departments are becoming more sophisticated, too, Johnson says. She notes that firms are hiring business-development writers, marketing technology specialists, and marketing specialists for individual practice groups. They are bringing public relations in house, “figuring out they can get for a yearly salary someone who is more entrenched in the day-to-day life of the firm” than an outside consultant working for a PR firm.

PROFESSIONALIZED MANAGEMENT

Certainly, there are a number of reasons law firms are creating this wide range of new positions. Deborah Addis, the Boston-based president of the law firm consulting firm, Addis & Reed Consulting, Inc., believes that the breadth of these positions “shows how law firms are moving to more elaborate and more professional organizational structures.” In her view, these new jobs are “the positive and inevitable result of the growth in law firm size, and a direct reflection of the increasing focus on professionalism in law firm management.”

Addis says that the organizational behavioral positions adopted by law firms — such as those filled by Jeannine Rupp and Carl Cooper at Kirkpatrick & Lockhart — are calculated to make people within an organization “happy and fulfilled, both professionally and on a personal level.” These jobs are “important for employee retention,” she adds, and are an outgrowth of getting more professional human resources managers in firms. They help firms decide the kind of programs needed to hold on to

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employees, especially given that “most people have life issues to deal with — aging parents, growing families, moving from one place to another, divorces and deaths.” Addis adds that she’s even heard of law firms creating special positions in-house for counseling on alcoholism and substance abuse. “These are real problems and real issues that people face, and it’s not that unusual to have those kinds of things be issues for employees of law firms.”

Addis believes that it is better for law firms and their management to face all of these issues head on rather than to have them “fester” while lawyers and staff members try to deal with them while working for clients and billing a substantial number of hours every week. She sees these new positions as reflecting a trend “toward the softer side of management.” They assist in creating a culture in a firm that makes it feel like a friendly place to work. A lot of companies pride themselves on being selected as one of the best places to work in America, and, she observes, “law firms are learning some lessons from these larger corporations. They

are doing what they are doing for employee retention on the one hand,

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and marketing to keep clients happy on the other.” In Addis’ view, this is a “direct result of the professionalization of management in law firms.”

CAN SMALL FIRMS FOLLOW?

Although much of the activity to date in this area has been in large national or international law firms, smaller and medium-sized firms can offer similar assistance to their employees. Indeed, Addis believes that smaller firms can do much of the same things that larger firms have begun to do, even if they don’t “break things out functionally” and add separate positions to focus on these problems. In other words, smaller firms can have their director of marketing or business development, or their other senior administrators, handling some of the same functions and dealing with

the same issues that people like Jeannine Rupp and Carl Cooper are handling at Kirkpatrick & Lockhart.

To do so, firms must essentially focus on lawyers and other employees as human beings, and recognize that the issues they have to face outside of work can impact their productivity, their ability and desire to work. It may not have been something that most firms thought about a decade or two ago, but the corporate world was different in the past, too. Law firms can no longer prosper under the system they used to follow; where some senior lawyers and the managing partner would make all significant decisions and would have their commands executed by legal secretaries, and when only work and the workday were considered in decision making. Now, a well-managed law firm, following the corporate model, must be more structured, more functional, more professional and more sophisticated. The corporate model has arrived to the law firm world. At least to the extent it benefits lawyers and other law firm employees, that would seem to be a very positive change.

