

# Tips on successful lateral moves

*Taking the time to invest in a new employment relationship pays dividends for both firms and associates.*

By Cleo Kirkland

**E**ven in this economic climate, lateral movement has become a way of life for associates and law firms. Many associates find themselves moving during their early careers and many law firms have made lateral hiring a central part of their growth strategy. However, a successful lateral move requires more than good intentions and a positive attitude. And while there are never any guarantees, there are a number of steps that law firms and lateral associates can take to greatly increase the chances of a successful transition. The following are recommendations to both firms and laterals as to how they can effectively integrate the new lawyer into the firm and its culture.

## Lawyers: resolutions, reading-up and relationships

### 1. Resolutions

Before you start your new job, think about what went right and (more importantly) what went wrong at your old job. Without evaluating your prior experience, you risk finding yourself struggling with the same dynamics that led you to seek a change in the first place. Were you a good time manager? How were your docketing practices? Did you keep other lawyers and clients apprised of your progress on files? Did you seek out work or just wait for it to be assigned? Were you a team player?

You should also speak to former colleagues about their feedback and ask for specifics. This is a unique opportunity to get candid and current views of those you worked with outside the confines of an ongoing employment relationship. Were you a good listener? Were you thorough? Did you work well with others? Did you consistently meet or exceed expectations? How could you have been a better lawyer?

You should try to understand exactly how you fit in and were viewed at your old firm, with the goal of upping your game at your new firm.

### 2. Reading-up

While most law firms are good at integrating students out of law school, many struggle when it comes to

integrating lateral associates. Try to make yourself at home in your new firm as quickly possible. Take it upon yourself to learn about the firm's people, history and politics, paying special attention to your practice area. Do not expect your new firm to go to great lengths to help get you settled or educate you on the culture and politics of the firm. If possible, find out where the alliances and tensions lie and how the hierarchy works more through observation than cross-examination.

### 3. Relationships

By far, the biggest determinant in the success of your

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## Comment réussir un recrutement à l'externe

*Pour les avocats et les cabinets, le recrutement à l'externe s'apparente actuellement à un mode de vie. Mais pour qu'il soit réussi, un certain nombre de mesures doivent être prises. Voici des recommandations issues de cabinets et d'avocats qui favoriseront la bonne intégration du nouveau juriste à la culture de l'organisation.*

### Avocats

#### 1. Résolutions

Avant votre entrée en fonction, pensez à ce qui a fonctionné et surtout à ce qui n'a pas marché lors de votre emploi antérieur. À cet effet, demandez-vous si vous étiez un bon gestionnaire, comment étaient vos pratiques de facturation et si vous avez tenu les clients et collègues informés sur l'évolution du dossier. Déterminez également si vous avez recouru à la sollicitation ou si vous vous êtes contenté d'attendre les mandats. Et puis, étiez-vous un adepte du travail d'équipe?

Vous devriez également demander l'avis de vos anciens collègues sur votre sens de l'écoute et votre esprit d'équipe. Demandez-leur aussi s'ils estiment que vous êtes consciencieux, que vous travaillez bien avec vos pairs et que vous avez satisfait, voire surpassé les attentes. Les réponses vous aideront à vous améliorer pour mieux tirer votre épingle du jeu lors de votre prochain emploi.

#### 2. Information

Intégrez-vous le plus rapidement possible au cabinet. Apprenez par vous-même qui sont vos collègues, ainsi que l'histoire et les politiques de l'organisation, tout en vous concentrant sur votre sphère de pratique. Tentez de découvrir par le biais de l'observation quels sont les alliances, les tensions et le fonctionnement hiérarchique qui prévalent dans l'organisation.

#### 3. Relations

L'élément clé pour votre succès réside

dans votre capacité à établir de solides relations avec vos nouveaux collègues. Durant votre première semaine de travail, arrangez-vous pour rencontrer les associés, juristes et les membres de l'équipe de soutien avec lesquels vous devrez travailler directement. Interrogez-les sur leurs fonctions et leur méthode de travail. Prenez le temps d'assister aux activités sociales comme les réceptions, soirées, réunions en groupe et séminaires de formation. Cela vous donnera l'occasion de bavarder en tête-à-tête avec d'autres juristes. Assurez-vous de les écouter attentivement et de leur poser des questions qui démontrent votre intérêt et votre enthousiasme. Un autre moyen efficace d'accroître votre visibilité est d'aider un collègue à planifier ou à effectuer une présentation destinée à différents groupes de pratique. Ce sont autant d'occasions qui témoignent de votre expertise et donneront bonne impression.

### Cabinets

#### 1. Mentorat

Les avocats font face à de grands défis au moment de leur intégration à un cabinet. Les avocats recrutés à l'externe et les cabinets ont des idées préconçues sur la manière de mener un dossier et sont influencés par leurs expériences passées. Cette transition peut être considérablement facilitée par l'intermédiaire du mentorat. À cet effet, les cabinets devraient fournir au mentor des principes directeurs généraux et lui faire

part des attentes relationnelles de manière à ce que la relation soit la plus bénéfique possible.

#### 2. Marketing

Les communications entre le cabinet et l'avocat devraient être coordonnées avant son entrée en fonction. Les cartes professionnelles devraient être prêtes dès le premier jour de travail et les annonces au sujet du recrutement de l'avocat transmises la première semaine. Le département de marketing devrait aussi rencontrer l'avocat durant la première semaine pour lui remettre un plan sur la façon dont le cabinet garantira sa visibilité à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de l'organisation.

#### 3. Suivi

Un suivi de l'intégration de l'avocat améliorera son affectation. Il conviendrait aussi de connaître la satisfaction de l'avocat, les problèmes qu'il a rencontrés, sans oublier de lui demander s'il dispose des ressources dont il a besoin. Vous pouvez aussi interroger les avocats et les personnes chargées de l'administration pour déterminer si l'avocat semble bien s'intégrer. Effectuez également des entrevues informelles après un mois, puis trois mois de travail, en plus de l'évaluation régulière qui a lieu tous les six mois.

Chose certaine : une préparation adéquate augmentera considérablement la probabilité que l'intégration de l'avocat soit réussie! **N**

— Yasmina El Jamaï

lateral move will be your ability to forge strong working relationships with your new colleagues. During your first week, arrange to meet with the partners, associates and support staff with whom you will be primarily working. Ask them about the work they do and the way they like to work. Although your first reaction may be to devote all your energies to producing good work product, you must allow time for socializing. You should attend social functions of any kind, such as receptions, parties, group meetings, training seminars, and recruiting lunches. Any of these events can afford you good opportunities for one-on-one conversations with other lawyers. Make sure you listen attentively and ask

questions that show your interest and enthusiasm. If there are not many social occasions, do not be afraid to make some. Your involvement in recruiting or firm management committees is a great way to meet other lawyers, and shows your commitment to the success of the organization. Another great way to get exposure to the lawyers at your firm is to help plan or make a presentation to your or another practice group. Many practice groups have regular meetings at which one or more of their lawyers speak to the group on a topic of mutual interest. These are good opportunities to demonstrate your expertise before and raise your profile among your peers.

## Firms: mentoring, marketing and monitoring

### 1. Mentoring

Lateral associates face real challenges when they join a new firm. Both the firm and the lateral come to the table with preconceived ideas of how a law firm should work and each will have been influenced by previous experiences. This transition process can be made considerably easier if the firm takes its personal and professional knowledge of the lateral and makes an effort to match him or her with the best possible mentor. Mentors should understand their roles and the firm's expectations for the relationship and regular feedback should be solicited from each of the participants. Although each mentor/mentee dynamic will be different, provide the lateral associate with some general guidelines and expectations for the relationship. The lateral's last firm may have approached mentoring differently or may not have had a mentoring program at all.

### 2. Marketing

A lateral hire gives both the firm and lateral the opportunity to communicate with clients and contacts. These communications should be co-ordinated between the firm and the new lawyer well before his or her first day or work. Business cards should also be ready on the first day and announcements should be sent out and published in the first week. In addition to the obvious marketing benefit, such profile-building activities also gives the lateral associate a sense of belonging right from the start. During the new lawyer's first week, he or she should be introduced to the marketing department and provided with a plan that demonstrates how the firm will be raising his or her profile inside and outside the firm and investing in his or her success.

### 3. Monitoring

At regular intervals, solicit the new associate's feedback on all aspects of his or her integration into the firm. Ask what was done well and what needs improvement. Are his or her expectations being met? Does he or she perceive any problems? Does he or she have the resources needed to succeed? You should also solicit feedback from lawyers, administrative staff and clerks about how the lateral seems to be fitting in.

An easy and often underused way for a firm to forecast the sorts of issues that may confront a new lateral associate is to go back and review the exit interview notes of associates who have left the relevant practice group and also, more generally, lateral associates that have come and gone from the firm. These notes can serve as an invaluable tool to help a firm identify systemic issues affecting lateral success and retention and empower it to take appropriate corrective measures.

Conduct informal reviews after one month and after three months. Formal reviews should be done at the six-month and one-year mark. Find out as soon as possible whether there are problems that need to be addressed.

Poor preparation seems to be the root cause of failed lateral hire situations. And as lateral movement becomes a growing reality for associates and firms alike, it is more important than ever to understand and implement best practices in lateral hiring. If firms and lawyers take the time to invest in their new situation and work on building strong relationships, the likelihood for a successful transition will be much greater. ■

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Left to Right: Etienne de Villiers, Bruce Stratton, Jenna Wilson, Alan Macek, Ron Dimock, Jennifer Ko, Vincent Man

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