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PARTNERS
JUST AHEAD

Firm Focus

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The key ingredients for a successful search.

There are several key ingredients for a successful retained search campaign. Here are our top 5:

1. Understand your client strategy

Without clarity of what you are looking for you will never find it. The underlying purpose of most search campaigns is client acquisition start with a client centred strategy.

What clients do we want as a firm? What are we known for? What leverage will we get from these clients into our other practice areas? Who has these clients? Will the client move with these individuals?

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2. Be realistic

Too often firms will seek out partners who are unrealistic. Firms need to evaluate what is realistic.

What are the likely ramifications of introducing another partner at equity level within a practice which is larger than your existing top performers?

What is the likelihood a leading partner will want to come and join our firm? Are we more likely to get a Senior Associate who we can work with who is overlooked due to the existing structure? What is the most likely scenario?

3. Why should a partner join you?

It seems quite simple, but it is the most difficult question to answer for many firms.

The standard response is that firms view this question from their own reflection, rather than from the partner's perspective.

Standard responses include: "We are a nice bunch of people." "We are a more collegiate group" "We have nice facilities, better offices with an open plan kitchen."

The real reason a partner will join you is that you can demonstrate you will address the key issues which are causing them to leave their current firm.

Can you make them feel valued and articulate how their practice is important to the future of the firm strategically?

Client acquisition is your primary driver, but making a partner feel that they are just another bolt on practice to the machine, is a sure way to drive a partner away from your firm.

4. Define the culture

Many firms talk about culture but rarely are they able to cogently articulate what their culture might be. Their evaluation is based on "gut-feel" rather than a clear definition.

Culture in any organisation is more than just a set of values on a website. Culture is an agreed set of behaviors which are lived and shared, never compromised and enforced by the leadership group. These same behaviours need to be assessed at the interview process.

Many firms rarely give this the attention it deserves, because it is ultimately the size of the practice which rules all decision making. However, think about what your client's perspective will be when you offer up a motley crew of partners who don't share the same values, don't really want to work together as a team to secure new projects, or refrain from internal referrals as a result of not wanting to spend time together.

Are your clients going to stay with your firm? Furthermore, how will this individual impact on your firm attracting quality lawyers in the future or keeping your best talent?

5. Define the process

Most partners will balk at the idea of a structured interview process. Instead many prefer a cosy fire side chat and see it as a break from their day-to-day billable activities. However, without a clearly defined process in place, there will be no navigation to your destination. Having an agenda of key items for discussion agreed upon before the interview takes place which is consistent for all interviews is a far better approach. In addition, a nominated partner who is responsible for coordinating the interviews is essential to the process.

Who will be our best to facilitate the hire?
Are there any partners who are likely to prevent this from happening?

Beware of the partners who are nesting on a decadent empire who turn away candidates on the basis they are “just not right for the firm.” They will destroy your ability to attract the right hire.

How long does a process need to be?
In our view, a proper interview process should not exceed a 3 month time to offer. A drawn out interview process does not support a better process.

Candidate feedback should be given within 24 hours. From a candidate's perspective, firms who do not respond in a timely manner and have elongated gaps between interview processes seem disinterested, rude and disengaged. Furthermore, if there are gaps due to availability of partners, let the candidate know. Set expectations about the process with your candidates early through open communication and you will command their respect.

For further information on your search strategy please contact us on +613 9935 2910.

Burrows Legal specialises in strategic career advancement for senior practitioners.

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