

Firm Tips For Helping New Lawyers Succeed Post-Pandemic

By **Lana Manganiello**

The landscape of professional development for early-career attorneys, particularly those who commenced their practice just before or during the pandemic, has been significantly altered due to the shift to remote work.

The concept of habit formation has never been more critical. Good habits — especially those related to relationship building and business development — can fill the gap left by the absence of traditional in-person networking and learning opportunities.



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These fundamental habits lay the foundation for the skill development required for personal and professional success, which is often overlooked in law school curriculum.

As firms transition back to in-office operations, facilitating and fostering these habits in early-career attorneys can dramatically boost their experience and overall development and pave the way for excellence in legal practice.

Building Momentum for Business Development Post-Pandemic

The idea of business development can be daunting for early-career attorneys, especially those who started their careers amid a pandemic and missed out on traditional in-person events and the benefits that came with them.

James Clear, in his book "Atomic Habits," underlines that people need an incentive to start and evidence to continue for a habit to form.

In the realm of business development, this implies finding immediately rewarding activities that align with personal values, goals and preferences.

These rewards can be as simple as a sports fan engaging in a bar association event held during a game at a local stadium or making a meaningful professional connection at an industry conference, or receiving positive feedback from colleagues or clients from a published article.

It's often the case that hearing about the long-term rewards of business development — such as professional fulfillment, financial gain and increased influence in your organization — isn't enough to motivate an attorney to implement a comprehensive business development strategy.

Instead, they need to experience the short-term rewards — the small wins — that create momentum and lead to long-term results.

Habits That Lead to Professional Growth in the New Normal

With remote work becoming the norm during the pandemic, early-career attorneys may overlook the benefits of being visible and proactive within the firm.

Similarly to building business development habits that lead to success, attorneys need to gradually reap short-term rewards to build the momentum that leads to long-term professional development results.

Many early-career attorneys have never experienced the invaluable professional development opportunities that arise from connecting individually with peers and colleagues — opportunities that used to happen naturally pre-pandemic when everyone worked in one office.

For law firms interested in having attorneys come into the office, it's essential to make sure early-career attorneys are experiencing the benefits of being physically with colleagues and seeing rewards as quickly as possible. These rewards might look like learning opportunities, collaboration, mentorships, friendships and feedback on legal skill development.

To facilitate positive experiences unique or enhanced by being in person, law firms can try variations of the following:

1. Hold regular practice, industry or committee group meetings in the office and break attorneys into small groups to brainstorm or collaborate on solutions to client or firm issues.
2. Encourage established attorneys to offer to meet in person to discuss work product and current matters with the intention of helping associates to better understand how their work fits into the client objectives.
3. Organize team-building social events, like themed lunches, happy hours or unique activities held in the office. Build in recognition opportunities to publicly acknowledge the collaborative achievements of attorneys.
4. Provide regular skill development trainings that incorporate collaborative elements. Include role-playing or opportunities to discuss real-life scenarios.
5. Foster mentorship relationships with scheduled, in-person meetings like a mentor-mentee lunch program or coordinated events.
6. Organize events around specific skill development themes, such as a mock trial competition where teams compete in a friendly environment, or a "legal escape room" where lawyers have to solve puzzles related to their work.
7. Host monthly lunches where different teams present interesting or challenging cases they are working on. This can provide a platform for knowledge sharing and spark discussions and collaborations.
8. Implement a policy where lawyers change their seating arrangement periodically. This can help them interact with different colleagues and build connections across the firm.
9. Start a firm speaker series and invite prominent legal scholars, judges and successful lawyers to give talks at your firm. This not only provides learning opportunities but also a chance for lawyers to connect over shared interests.
10. Host firmwide competitions like moot courts, negotiation challenges, or even something fun like a bake-off or a sports day. This can bring out the competitive spirit, encourage teamwork and build connections.

Conclusion

While it's true that every professional should take the lead on their own professional development, it's also essential to recognize that relationship-building, visibility and self-advocacy are skills not often taught in law school.

By providing training, coaching and mentorship in these areas — as well as facilitating opportunities for cross-firm connection — firms can significantly improve the early-career trajectory of attorneys who embarked on their professional journey during the pandemic era, laying the foundation for a fulfilling practice in the legal profession.

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