

HOW TO STOP YOUR IN-HOUSE LAWYERS FROM WALKING: A THREE STEP GUIDE

RETAINING QUALITY IN-HOUSE LAWYERS DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN THROWING MORE MONEY AT THEM. HERE ARE THREE THINGS EMPLOYERS CAN DO TO STOP THEIR STAFF FROM WALKING OUT THE DOOR WITHOUT OFFERING MORE PAY.

MOTIVATION

It's not hard to see why many lawyers leave private practice to go in-house. Corporates often offer a flatter hierarchy and better work/life balance than law firms. They can also give lawyers the opportunity to get up close and personal with the way a business works.

But many of the same things that attract solicitors to take up a corporate role when they're mid-career can start holding them back when they're at the top of their game. After all, a flat structure is usually accompanied by flat salaries and – unless your lawyers are on the path to becoming GC – remaining in the same role can start feeling like a career dead end.



But if you're struggling to keep hold of good in-house lawyers in light of these challenges, don't despair. Here's our three-step guide to keeping them satisfied and staying put.

1. KNOW WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH

The first thing to remember is that, for most people, there's a big difference between remuneration and reward. So understanding what really motivates your staff, and then feeding this motivation, is one of the most important factors in getting them to stay.

Generally, when it comes to motivation, **there are six types of employee:**

THE AWARD SEEKER

These workers like to keep busy and stay on track. At the end of the day, a reward with both monetary and trophy value will keep them smiling. **REWARDS OF CHOICE:** gift cards and travel awards.

THE NESTER

A reward that takes the nester away from their home is more like a punishment. These employees love their work and family but need to keep things balanced.

REWARDS OF CHOICE: days off, flexible scheduling and dinners out with their families.

THE BOTTOM LINER

Don't bother patting this employee on the back unless you have some cash in your hand. Money talks and it's their first language.

REWARDS OF CHOICE: cash bonuses, cumulative award points programs (points can be cashed in for rewards).

THE FREEDOM YEARNER

Meaningful work wins out over material stuff for these employees – probably because they're likely to possess a certain level of financial success and security.

REWARDS OF CHOICE: flexible hours, freedom to choose how to achieve their goals, ability to choose interesting and challenging projects, conference attendance.

THE PRAISE CRAVER

This worker's driven by acknowledgement and affirmation

from managers and peers – with or without a financial incentive.

REWARDS OF CHOICE: verbal, written or formal praise from managers, informal praise by peers.

THE UPWARD MOVER

These employees are the most satisfied and committed of all. They love their job and have their eyes firmly fixed on the upper rungs of the ladder.

REWARDS OF CHOICE: meals with company management, opportunities to mentor and work with people.

If you're not sitting down with staff members informally to find out what really makes them tick, start doing it today. All it involves is a bit of conversation with some well-placed questions – and the ability to give them what they're craving.

2. FOCUS ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Understanding what motivates your staff is one thing. But, let's face it – they're all still going to face the same dilemma: if there are 10 or 20 lawyers in a team and only one General Counsel, the chances of making it to the top are not high. (In fact, they're even worse than in private practice.)

This often leads to a perceived lack of growth and, ultimately, job dissatisfaction – especially if your team member is an Upward Mover.

But there are ways to foster employee growth and development, even for lawyers who aren't on the path to GC.

Start by having a frank but informal one-on-one discussion about their career aspirations. What are they working towards? Where do they want to be in three-to-five years' time? And what can you, as an employer do to help them get there?



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Once you've put it all out in the open, continue with more formal meetings to document strategies and plans that will help employees realise their goals and dreams.

You can also work with employees to broaden and deepen their experience in other ways: for instance by seconding them to another part of the business, putting them in charge of new projects or letting them sit in on strategy meetings.

Speaking of which...

3. GET THEM ON BOARD WITH YOUR STRATEGY

No matter what type of employee you have, it's amazing how much happier they will usually be – and how much better they will work – when their day-to-day work has a sense of purpose.

This means letting your lawyers in on the business strategy, so that they can see the bigger picture and how what they do fits into it.

You could – and should – take this step further by drawing an obvious line between that strategy and your lawyers' KPIs and performance reviews. Again, the best way to implement this is usually via a communication framework which starts with one-on-one informal chats and then ends up in formal company-wide strategy meetings.

This won't just help your lawyers align themselves with the direction of the company. It will also help build a more cohesive and happy team in the process. In other words, it's a win/win situation where making your staff more satisfied helps your (and the company's) bottom line.

AND FINALLY...

This is just meant to be a start. Savvy employers will often find creative ways to hold onto key staff. There are so many things you can do to help good people stay without dipping further into your pockets. (Especially if you find you're not dealing with a Bottom Liner).

These three steps for doing just that came out of round table event I hosted with the founder of **Catalina Consultant's** Marilyn Speiser as part of our In-House Legal Horizon Breakfast Series.

If you'd like to find out more about what you can do, or if you have any questions about how to attract and retain good in-house counsel, please **get in touch**.