

How Law Firms Can Recruit and Retain Talent in 2024: An Interview with Marlene Sauer

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Among recent technological advancements, the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, and different cultural shifts, law firms and in-house legal teams are facing new challenges in attracting and retaining top legal talent. HR professionals are constantly on the lookout for creative ideas and fresh strategies for nurturing talent and reducing turnover, particularly when it comes to balancing the needs of the firm with the flexibility that employees expect today.



Marlene Sauer (Leason Ellis, USA)

Marlene Sauer is the Executive Director of Human Resources at INTA member firm Leason Ellis (USA). She sat down with the *INTA Bulletin* to discuss how her firm is navigating these recent trends and new challenges in recruitment and retention as well as the benefits of using a legal-specific career center for positing open positions, and she shares her advice for young brand professionals starting out on their career journeys.

As an HR professional, what are some of the trends you are currently seeing in legal recruitment?

An ongoing trend in legal recruitment is the increasing demand for top talent at all levels—those who not only have the educational background and requisite experience, but who also understand and support the internal/external client service model and the business of law. Staffing and salary levels, benefit offerings, work-life balance, billable hours, billing rates, marketing, training and development, interesting hands-on legal work, and client service requirements are key data points that need to be considered and balanced as part of a firm's culture, especially as these issues impact legal recruitment and retention.

There seems to be a skills and talent shortage at the moment, as well as difficulties attracting the right talent for open positions. How is Leason Ellis navigating these challenges?

We use a variety of resources to attract the right talent for the open positions we are looking to fill. We have

certain non-negotiable criteria, but we remain open to nontraditional candidates who can offer a great deal and succeed. Our firm's reputation is well known in the intellectual property (IP) field. We pay competitively and provide a unique platform that attracts talent and encourages growth and retention via training, mentoring, interesting client work, and hands-on involvement.

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The legal field seems to want more flexibility and independent working in the post-COVID era. Have you incorporated any different work models at Leason Ellis to recruit and retain staff?

Yes, we have successfully incorporated a flexible hybrid on-site/remote work/meeting model. Generally speaking, employees on average come into the office to work two days per week. Why? Because they understand the benefits of doing so—for them personally and their respective practice groups. We are a relationship-based firm, and our flexible hybrid model complements individual circumstances as well as our business needs. Our practice groups and administrative teams strive to be in the office on certain days each week, which helps with ongoing training and mentoring, particularly with respect to newly hired individuals or those who are in the earlier stages of their careers.

Turnover has also increased in recent years. With the fear of lawyers leaving, what advice do you have for the legal community to increase retention?

We pride ourselves in having a strong platform which embraces individuality and diversity and encourages lawyers to join our ranks and continue to grow in their careers. New hires frequently provide positive feedback about our thorough onboarding process as well as the professional support and development they receive from Leason Ellis compared to their prior firms.

Departures do occur but should not be feared. The legal community can increase retention by reviewing their core offerings and focusing on what differentiates their firm from others. The marketplace is such that individuals want a variety of things that matter to them personally and professionally—not just being paid high salaries in exchange for high billable-hour requirements and higher non-billable demands.

How do you promote open and available positions at Leason Ellis?

Leason Ellis is always looking for top legal talent who will complement our ranks, thrive in our work environment, and enhance our client service business model. We use a variety of resources to promote the open and available legal positions we are recruiting to fill. These resources include employee referrals and a referral bonus policy, word of mouth referrals, posting positions on the careers section of our website, and posting positions on a variety of social media platforms, university career centers, and IP-specific associations, such as [INTA's Career Center](#).

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What are the benefits that you see in using a legal-specific career center?

We have found that posting positions on legal-specific association and university career centers—and specifically INTA's Career Center—is especially beneficial since it puts our postings in front of a targeted group of IP-focused legal professionals. Either members themselves are interested in a career opportunity or may know of someone who is searching for a new position. Referrals and networking within an association's membership ranks are instrumental to our recruiting endeavors.

What advice do you have for young professionals entering the legal profession today?

They should make it a priority to differentiate themselves in terms of their practical skills and demonstrated commitment to the practice of law. Determine what abilities are valued most by firms and make sure that you excel in those areas. Hard work and networking lead to business development and long-term success. Equally important is understanding and supporting the business of law and being respectful to colleagues at all levels.

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