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RULES FOR A GREAT SUMMER PROGRAM

by Susan G. Manch

As the summer associate season begins for most law firms, many firms are still grappling with the best means to both enthruse and evaluate their summer charges. There is always a delicate balance to maintain between the functions of recruitment and selection--making them want to come back, but also making sure they are truly a good fit for the firm. With ever-increasing summer and new associate pay scales, it is critical that summer programs provide firms with both the opportunity to screen talent and to assure acceptances from the top participants. Designing a compelling summer program requires experience, thoughtfulness, and lots of attorney commitment. There are many great programs in firms throughout the country, but most successful programs attend carefully to the following cardinal rules.

Rule 1: Know your Audience

First and foremost, you have to have a sense of what the summer associate expectations may be. What do they want? Law students say they are looking for exposure to life in private practice and they want "real work," not "make work." They want to be involved in the dynamic and exciting practice groups, preferably with high profile clients. They want meaningful work that will have impact and express sincere interest in *pro bono* work. They want to see senior attorneys in action--they want to go to court, watch a deal in progress, be in on a negotiation, and strategize with the team leaders. But most of all, they want to learn whether their summer law firm should become their permanent law firm. They want to find out if there are people like themselves in the firm, individuals who share their values and beliefs. They want to feel as though they belong and can be a contributing part of the larger organization.

Rule 2: Know your Attorneys

Summer's coming, it's time to lock Joe in his office! Alright, maybe firms are not actually locking away the "difficult" partners, but most are putting out the word for *everyone* to be on his or her best behavior. Past surveys of summer associates in large law firms point out the need for lots of attorney involvement in all aspects of the program. Summers want to see and work with the firm's senior attorneys. There are plenty of roles for attorneys to play in a successful program. Use everyone's talents to their best advantage. Some firm members should be trainers or lead substantive discussions, others may be at their best in the social venue, and still others can be depended upon to expend the time necessary to individually shepherd one or more summers through their experience.

This last group of attorneys are a critical part of the success of any program, providing the one-on-one

guidance and oversight so valued by law students. Many firms translate this into a buddy system. At Kirkpatrick & Lockhart in Pittsburgh, summer associates are assigned a partner and two associates as buddies. The Buddies' job is to make sure that the student is pleased with his or her assignments, that he or she is getting on-going feedback, and that all questions are being answered. Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering in Washington, D.C. assigns both a partner and an associate mentor to each summer associate to make certain the experience is a positive one.

Rule 3: Real Work, but not Boring Work

One of the enduring contradictions between what law students say they want and what they really want arises when they say they want to do the same work that an associate might do, but they don't want to work on boring, long projects. Recognizing that a good bit of junior associate work can be perceived as being at worst boring and at best, less than stimulating, firms are faced with the challenge of finding a good supply of short (one to two weeks, at most), interesting (preferably in the hottest practice areas, working with the most visible clients), and realistic (meaning something a client would actually pay for) assignments to mete out to this group. This presents a true challenge.

Gardner, Carton & Douglas in Chicago tells summer associates that they will get "RJP," or a Realistic Job Preview. To achieve this objective, they employ what they call the "Shadow Program." Summers have the opportunity to *shadow* a partner in his or her day to day work, thus being exposed to the real mix of an attorney's day-to-day practice. The Summer Program Committee at Wiley, Rein & Fielding in Washington, D.C. solicits projects for summers from all attorneys in the firm. They then oversee the allotment of assignments to ensure variety and fairness. Dow, Lohnes & Albertson in D.C. also uses a central committee comprised of a partner and three associates to monitor the assignments being given to each summer associate. Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering has SAWG, or the Summer Associate Working Group to monitor all summer work assignments.

Rule 5: Prove you can Develop my Skills

Professional development is one of the most important factors law students assess as they make their career decisions. Will this firm help me to develop my legal skills? Do they have the resources to make it possible? Can they show me that they are committed to on-going training for all firm attorneys? All these questions and more are waiting to be answered by the quality of the training you provide during the summer months.

Some firms take a very formal approach to training. Powell, Goldstein, Fraser & Murphy in Atlanta conducts POGO University for its attorneys, providing summers with a look at what all associates are exposed to in the way of training. Monthly instructional programs presented by firm experts address both litigation and corporate strategies and techniques. Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld in Washington, D.C. holds a six-week litigation clinic culminating in a mock trial. Teams of summer associates take a case from the initial client interview through to the trial presided over by partner "judges." Covington & Burling in D.C. offers an intensive deposition and advocacy program for their summer associates taught by the firm's top litigators. Morrison & Foerster in San Francisco offers

realistic training in both litigation and corporate skills exposing summers to mock trials and mock business acquisition transactions. Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner in D.C. offers substantive training programs throughout the summer in patent, copyright, and trademark law in addition to legal writing instruction.

Rule 6: Watch Over Me

The worst possible result of a summer program isn't the refusal of an offer, it is having a summer associate feel that he or she was treated poorly or unfairly. While it may not be possible to please every personality represented in your group of summers, it is absolutely necessary that each of them feel that the firm made an effort to treat them with respect and fairness. To accomplish this end, following the previous five rules will be helpful, but in addition, you must make firm attorneys accountable for the individual experiences of the summer attorneys.

The first step is to orient them to what the summer holds in store for them. Tell what the firm expects of them and, in turn, what they can expect of the firm. Explain what they will be doing and the way in which it will be evaluated. Tell them which events and activities are command performances and which are optional. Introduce them to their buddies or advisors and point out who they can expect to be working with. Encourage them to speak up, ask questions, and let someone know if something is not going as expected.

The second step is to make certain that they are receiving regular, meaningful feedback on the work that they are doing. Wiley, Rein & Fielding ensures early feedback by providing summers with a mid-summer evaluation. This practice helps identify problems early and gives the student the best possible chance to succeed. They end the summer with another evaluation that provides guidance for the future. Dow, Lohnes & Albertson provides each summer with an advisor who makes certain that they receive developmental feedback on every assignment.

The third step is to help them bond with their summer classmates. Provide structured interactions that encourage summer associates to get to know one another and to begin forming a team identity. Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld hosts weekly summer associate lunches at which firm partners make presentations on their sections and areas of expertise. Latham & Watkins in Los Angeles takes its summer associates away on a four-day retreat that provides students with a diverse menu of training programs and discussion groups.

Rule 7: Stay True to Your Firm

There is no need to try to be something you are not. In this world of internet and instant messaging, there are no secrets. Building a false set of expectations for summer associates will yield nothing but poor choices on both sides. The student may choose an employer under false assumptions of what it will be like to work there and the firm may choose an employee poorly suited to the firm's culture. Neither presents a recipe for success. Use your preparations for the summer program as an opportunity to reconnect with the firm's institutional personality and values. Learn to embrace your

culture and describe its attributes to recruits. Too many firms today seem to be trying to be like some other firm. It never works.

No More Rules

Well, that is the last of the cardinal rules for a successful summer program. “Wait,” you say, “You haven’t mentioned social programming!” Ah, yes--the fun part. The truth of the matter is that almost every firm already does a great job on the social side. Cooking classes, dinner cruises, professional sports, concerts, intimate dinners at partner’s homes, theater tickets, bungee jumping, surfing lessons, and more opportunities to eat than could ever be accepted by any given summer. No, you need no help from me on the lighter side of summer. But do attend to those earlier rules in addition to having a frolicsome experience and you will find that your summer associates will appreciate the effort (at least the ones you *really* want).

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