

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Building a Star-Studded, Long-Tenured Marketing Team

By Jennifer Johnson Scalzi

It's nearing the end of the first quarter and if you're like most people, you solidified goals as close to January as possible and are regularly checking in on your team to gauge whether you've met the milestones. As we all know, setting and achieving goals in a professional services environment can be challenging due to the differences in marketing certain practice groups and in how one practice group may perceive success compared with another.

As a result, many marketing leaders find themselves in a constant state of flux. They're dealing with the above dynamic and they're also

under intense pressure to bring in best practices from outside the industry. It's a push-and-pull: Firms want the innovation that other industries bring, but they also want fast results and don't want to wait for the ramp-up. Marketing leaders are tasked with building the best teams, full of innovative thinkers from outside the industry who can effect change, but also chock-full of legal marketing expertise and team members who "get it" and know how to get things done fast in a partnership environment. A consequence of managing this constant push-and-pull is that talent management can take a back seat.

TRENDS OF INTEREST

Recently, our firm completed a survey of the AmLaw Second Hundred CMOs; the survey featured a look at what trends were driving hiring and team-building in this peer set. The survey found, among other datapoints, a move toward specialization in marketing roles

and specifically an increase in hiring marketing technology staffers and content creators.

Both types of those marketing professionals are expected to be in high demand regardless of the industry. Communications professionals who can weave a narrative with words and visuals — think infographics — are going to be clear winners in a shrinking talent pool. Technology professionals who know how to extract competitive intelligence from data and can also use technology to reach a law firm's clients whether by mobile apps or other means, will likely be sifting through multiple job offers in the coming years.

So how does an already busy CMO keep an existing team happy, hit the goals the firm needs, satisfy the partnership and continue to recruit the best, even if non-traditional, talent?

If we knew the exact formula, then legal marketing would cease to exist as we know it.

However, there are a few things for

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marketing leaders to keep in mind in this new operating environment.

TIPS FOR MARKETING LEADERS

First, we need to remember that a talent shortage exists and it will continue. Most professionals want a stimulating work environment, some work-life balance and opportunity for career progression. CMOs should pay particular attention to these items in the context of employee retention, and take a page from the playbook of non-legal-marketing leaders, if necessary.

A talent retention strategy used in other industries involves routinely rotating team members in and out of certain roles for leadership development purposes. For example, a supervisor may deploy a good project manager in a communications role in order to groom that person for another role years ahead, and to bring more structure to the communications function. While that type of cross-training is not completely possible in many law firms, a scaled-down version of that practice may work.

CMOs can consider allowing the creative team to use their project management skills to organize a highly visible technology project. Or, a proposal writer with terrific editing skills could help the financial team with an internal communications effort for a migration to a new system. Allowing professionals to utilize their core skills and stretch outside their traditional boundaries gives them a challenge and the

opportunity to work with new people, accomplishes the firm's goals and helps the marketing department guard against the too-common problem of one person knowing everything about one project.

Second, marketing leaders should recognize that integration takes time and if they choose to enhance their teams with someone from outside the industry they will need a slightly different on-boarding plan. About a decade ago, we saw the first influx of non-legal marketing talent enter the industry at the C-level. Some of those individuals are still firmly rooted in legal marketing, while others exited quickly. We are again facing a talent shortage and we are also in need of those specialized roles, some of which have only been performed in consumer marketing or technology. Successful integration of these new legal marketers takes effort on the part of both the CMO and the team member. CMOs must be able to demonstrate to the partnership the benefits of the outside perspective and the incoming team member must also be able to slow down when necessary, participate in educational conversations, and at times accept that they may need to take one step forward and two steps back.

Finally, marketing leaders should continue adding measurement and rigor into their yearly plans. While the conversations around pricing and procurement are happening more in the Am Law 100, like most

trends, it's only a matter of time before that concept makes its way to the Second Hundred. As clients are demanding more rigor and process from their lawyers, so will lawyers begin demanding more from their marketing teams. Forward-thinking marketing leaders can begin this process by initiating the conversation, setting the example and providing early success stories even before partners begin asking. Hiring the outsider can be highly instrumental in making this happen.

CONCLUSION

Things are not likely to slow down for the legal marketer anytime soon. Busy is good, but "busy and effective" is better. In the crush of daily business, it's tempting to take the shortcut or forego the talent management aspects of leading a marketing department. But the potential gains for your firm in having a star-studded, long-tenured marketing team cannot be ignored.



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