

# Geared Up for Growth

More legal career professionals are assuming larger roles in their law firms.

BY GAYLE P. ENGLERT

NALP — The Association for Legal Career Professionals



More than 20 years ago, the vast majority of NALP's law firm members worked as recruitment coordinators and recruitment administrators who were primarily responsible for coordinating the administrative paperwork of the recruitment process. While law firms still hire legal recruiting administrators whose primary role is to coordinate the recruitment of new associates directly out of law school, the breadth, scope, and diversity of the roles that legal career professionals play in law firms have grown substantially.

Today, entire recruiting departments, led by a director of recruiting or a chief recruitment officer, are responsible for virtually every aspect of the recruitment of both new associates and lateral attorneys of every sort. In addition, in the last decade, many legal recruiters have seen their careers grow and change as they have assumed new and different professional responsibilities in their law firms. Some recruitment professionals have assumed expanded roles that still include

have largely all been transformed into roles that are held by professional legal administrators and other managers.

Since the early 1980s, NALP has conducted a biennial survey of law firm career professionals that documents this growth and change – collecting information to measure their salaries, education and experience levels, and scopes of responsibility. The results of the most recent survey, conducted in 2006, confirm that the scope and level of

The growth in the roles that many NALP members play in their law firms is part of a rapid professionalization of law firm management that has taken place in the last decade. Gone are the days when practicing attorneys were responsible for nearly all aspects of law firm management.

recruiting, while other former recruitment administrators now focus their professional energies on other emerging professional roles in the law firm setting, including lawyer professional development, diversity management, and even lawyer career development and career coaching.

### **RAPID PROFESSIONALIZATION**

The growth in the roles that many NALP members play in their law firms is part of a rapid professionalization of law firm management that has taken place in the last decade. Gone are the days when practicing attorneys were responsible for nearly all aspects of law firm management. While practicing lawyers, partners, and associates are still responsible for setting policies and establishing business goals, the actual management roles – from marketing to recruiting to human relations to diversity to training –

responsibility for NALP's law firm members continue to grow, as do their salaries. In addition, an increasing number of NALP's law firm members hold J.D. degrees, particularly in the lawyer professional development arena.

According to the survey, as of April 1, 2006, the median salary for directors of legal recruitment was \$101,000, the median salary for recruiting coordinators was \$62,000, and the median salary for directors of professional development was \$176,000. Among directors and managers of recruiting, 18 percent reported having a J.D. — and for those new to their jobs, the percentage was higher, at 28 percent. The majority of directors of professional development, particularly those who are relatively new to their jobs, hold J.D. degrees. Levels of experience in the field as a whole have also trended up over time, with more than 40 percent of those who hold director or manager jobs having 10 or more years of experience in the profession.

### FIRMWIDE CHIEF RECRUITMENT OFFICERS

With the continued consolidation of the law firm market and the trend toward ever-larger law firms with more offices worldwide, firmwide chief recruitment officers are becoming more pivotal to firms' operations. Professionals in this role – sometimes called chief talent acquisition officers or chiefs of legal personnel – are responsible for all aspects of new associate and lateral attorney acquisition across all offices of their law firms, often including international offices.

Regardless of the title, the position is one of a new class of senior management roles that are emerging at law firms. The firmwide chief recruitment officer typically reports to the firm's executive director, managing partner, or both, and the number of NALP members who hold this position continues to grow.

### RECRUITERS WITH HYBRID JOBS

Another trend in the legal recruitment profession is the rapid growth of hybrid jobs. Whereas legal recruiters once focused almost solely on coordinating the recruitment of new attorneys right out of law school, NALP members with legal recruiting jobs increasingly hold a variety of other responsibilities as well, including lawyer professional development, continuing legal education compliance,

have emerged as major administrative roles only within the last ten years.

### LAWYER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Among the relatively new professional roles that NALP members hold, none has emerged more quickly in recent years than lawyer professional development. While legal recruiting professionals have long been involved in lawyer training, recent years have seen the rapid emergence and maturation of a new professional role within law firms and within the NALP membership — the director of lawyer professional development.

While professional development efforts were once focused primarily on entry-level training and orientation, now the field encompasses much more, including virtually every aspect of professional development. Professional development administrators are often responsible for overseeing retention, diversity, mentoring, evaluations, work assignment systems, and even compensation. Increasingly, they also serve as ombudspersons and counselors to their firms' lawyers, oversee work assignments, and manage orientation as well as outplacement programs.

Professional development administrators also assist their firms in assessing training needs and developing

The programs that professional development administrators create are central to the management of today's law firms. Professionals who hold these roles often work closely with firm management to develop policies and solve problems.

oversight of professional licenses and bar memberships, marketing and business development, paralegal hiring, supervision and evaluation, office and facilities management, pro bono coordination, and benefits and payroll administration for non-lawyers.

While legal recruiting staff has long had oversight for some of these responsibilities, others are new, and the percentage of time devoted to non-recruiting responsibilities continues to grow. Moreover, some responsibilities – such as coordinating diversity initiatives, lawyer training and development, and career counseling and coaching –

curricula to help lawyers do their jobs more efficiently and effectively. The programs that professional development administrators create are central to the management of today's law firms. Professionals who hold these roles often work closely with firm management to develop policies and solve problems. These responsibilities can occur on a firmwide basis, office basis, or even at the practice group level. And while people with hybrid jobs occupy many professional development roles, an increasing number of legal career professionals hold responsibilities that are exclusively in the lawyer professional development arena.



## ASSOCIATE ATTRITION

The increase of attorney professional development efforts has occurred in part due to rapidly rising associate attrition rates, and the legal industry's growing awareness of the cost of that attrition. Beginning in 1997, the NALP Foundation for Law Career Research and Education conducted periodic benchmark studies of associate attrition, seeking to measure the rate of attrition and the reasons why attorneys leave. With the publication of the pioneering *Keeping the Keepers* report in 1998 that documented an average annual associate attrition rate of 15 percent, and a departure rate within the first five years that approached 65 percent, firms began focusing on how to stem the flow of unwanted associate departures.

Training quickly emerged as one of the most important factors in retaining junior associates, and with this insight, the burgeoning field of lawyer professional development took off. Since that time, associate attrition rates have continued to rise. The NALP Foundation's most recent attrition studies suggest a current average annual associate attrition rate of 19 percent and a departure rate within the first five years of 71 percent. The good news is that large firms, which once had some of the poorest rates of

retention, now have some of the best — a change that some attribute to the resources large firms have devoted to lawyer professional development efforts.

## LAW FIRM CAREER COUNSELORS

Another new role assumed by NALP members who once held more traditional recruitment roles — or, in some cases, positions on the law school side of NALP's membership — is that of career coach and counselor. As more law firms expand their lawyer professional development programs, offering comprehensive training and mentoring opportunities to lawyers, some have gone a step further to focus on individual associate counseling. In 2004, two law firms experimented with this new role, and since then the trend has grown.

With titles such as career development manager or career guidance specialist, legal professionals in this role are responsible for developing career counseling programs for firm associates. Such a program generally includes resources, programs, and counseling that focus on individual career development and advancement planning, goal setting, succession planning, and consideration of client and other external career opportunities.

The career counselor's primary responsibility is to act as a coach to the firm's associates, but other duties connected to associate development are common, including coordination of mentoring, training, and work assignments, and, when appropriate, transitional counseling. Firms that have introduced this role have found that a well-run counseling program can boost retention, morale, and goodwill among firm lawyers as well as future alumni of the firm. The recent emergence of career counselors at law firms is a perfect example of the specialization and growth that legal career professionals have experienced during the last 10 years.

### DIVERSITY PROFESSIONALS

Another relatively new management level position emerging in more law firms is that of the diversity professional. An Altman Weil survey conducted in December 2006 and January 2007 found that half of responding AmLaw 200 firms now have a designated diversity manager or director, up 5.4 percent from the prior year.

As with many recruiting and professional development administrators, the titles assigned to individuals in diversity management roles vary, including director of diversity, diversity manager, diversity counsel, and chief diversity officer. For some, the scope of responsibility extends beyond diversity and includes recruiting and/or professional development. The professional history of many in dedicated diversity positions includes a J.D. degree and one or more years practicing law.

#### about the author

Gayle P. Englert, the Director of Human Resources at Cole, Schotz, Meisel, Forman & Leonard, P.A., is Vice President of NALP's Board of Directors. She is also a Trustee of the New Jersey Chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators and a past President of the Morris County New Jersey Chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management. Englert is the author of *Leading the Legal Recruitment Team: A Recruitment Administrator's Handbook* (NALP, 2001). Note: Judy Collins, NALP's Director of Research; James Leipold, NALP's Executive Director; Irena McGrath, Chief Associate Recruitment Officer for Hogan & Hartson LLP; and Kari Anne Tuohy, a principal of KAT Consulting and a former NALP member, also contributed to this article.

Regardless of their titles or work histories, diversity professionals are generally responsible for the ongoing development and implementation of their firms' diversity strategies and initiatives. Most diversity professionals report to their firms' executive committees, management committees, and/or managing partners, and they work closely with or sit on their firms' diversity committees. The emergence of the diversity professional position is a breakthrough in the level of commitment some firms are investing in diversity, and it's another example of the increasingly specialized roles that legal career professionals play in today's law firms.

### NALP'S ROLE

As the professional roles that NALP members fulfill within their law firms continue to expand, NALP provides professional training and support through the structure of a volunteer-led membership association. NALP is also committed to supporting the annual Professional Legal Management Week and continuing to study and document the many emerging roles that legal career professionals hold in law firms and law schools. ♦

#### ABOUT NALP



Now known as NALP — The Association for Legal Career Professionals, the National Association for Law Placement® was founded in 1971, during a period of rapid change in both the legal profession and legal education, in response to a perceived need by many law schools and legal employers for a common forum to discuss issues involving placement and recruitment.

NALP is now the primary professional association for more than 2,200 individuals who work for law schools, law firms, and other public and private legal employers in a variety of professional roles, including as directors of law school career services offices, directors of law school public service and pro bono offices, directors of law firm recruiting departments, directors of lawyer professional development and training, and directors of law firm diversity initiatives.

NALP is dedicated to facilitating legal career counseling and planning, recruitment and retention, and the professional development of law students and lawyers. To learn more about NALP, visit [www.NALP.org](http://www.NALP.org).