

## What the recruiting process can tell you about a firm

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Due diligence is a critical component of an effective job search. It is ego gratifying to receive a job offer. But before accepting, there are important questions that most people ask.

For example, does the new firm have enough of the kind of work and clients you like? Does the culture of the department seem right? Have you met the key players you will be working with and do they seem to share your values? What are the partnership prospects in your practice group?

Presuming you know what you want, the next task is to see how the new firm measures up against these variables. Speaking with past and present associates in your potential practice group is a good way to get some answers. But assessing how well the firm is run in a more general sense presents a greater challenge.

One way to make this assessment is to look at the way the firm handles the recruiting process. While a well-run recruiting operation is no guarantee of a well-run firm, if the recruiting effort is poorly run it should send up some red flags.

What follows is a list of 10 practices that are the mark of an effective recruiting process. Firms that follow all 10 of these steps are demonstrating that they understand what it takes to attract top talent and are committed to this goal (which is a very good sign on a number of levels).

If a firm you are evaluating does not follow all or most of these steps, you may need to ask more questions before you accept the offer.

### Best recruiting practices

**1. Responding to all inquiries** — Firms with a well-oiled recruiting machine understand the importance of treating all attorneys with respect, including candidates who lack the credentials to be considered.

**2. Having someone responsible for the candidate relationship and treating all prospects like an important house guest** — Were you made to feel welcome when you showed up at the firm for interviews? Did anyone seem to be hosting you? At the end of the interviews, did your host tell you what the next step would be? This type of personal touch shows class, and if this courtesy is extended to you, it is a sign that the firm understands how to treat important prospects.

**3. Choosing interviewers carefully** — Interviewing candidates is a skill, just as taking a deposition is a skill. Some lawyers are good at it and some are not. Did the lawyers you met seem comfortable in the role of interviewer? Did they speak positively about the pluses of working at their firm?

**4. Having a good story to tell** — Law firms commonly tell prospects that their firm is collegial, growing in profitability and committed to developing its associates. Do the interviewers seem to have something more to say beyond the standard platitudes that make the firm sound like every other firm?

**5. Making sure everyone who is interviewing candidates knows the story** — Is the story you hear from different interviewers consistent?

**6. Keeping the process moving along and keeping candidates informed about the process** — For many firms, lateral recruiting is a Catch-22. The firm is hiring because it needs more help; but partners and associates are too busy to interview prospects. Nonetheless, a firm that is successful at recruiting talent knows the importance of keeping the process moving and understands the importance of communicating with the candidate on a regular basis.

**7. Asking candidates to articulate any concerns they might have and giving candidates the opportunity to meet with additional lawyers after extending an offer** — A well-run firm wants to hire candidates who are likely to be successful and who are likely to stay at the firm. It is important for the firm to give a candidate ample opportunity to evaluate all aspects of the firm.

**8. Not forcing a decision; but giving the candidate a reasonable deadline** — This can shed insight into how the firm views your separate and personal interests, aside from its own interests.

**9. Having a key partner call the candidate after an offer is extended to let the candidate know how much the firm would like him or her to come on board.**

**10. Sending a written offer letter outlining the key terms of the relationship** — The offer letter will generally contain “at will” language clarifying that the letter is not intended to be construed as an employment contract.