

## Encouraging Associates

In most firms, associates are distinguished by: (1) their number of billable hours; (2) their class; (3) their practice group; and, (4) the office location. Before someone can coach or mentor an associate, he must know them not only as lawyers but also as people. I learned this when I was first assigned to be in charge of attorney development at Jenkens & Gilchrist. The associates who did not know me did not know whether to trust me. I decided I wanted to get to know as many of our associates as possible.

I was able to get to know associates by taking them and their spouses to dinner. Whenever I traveled to one of our offices I would take a group of associates to dinner. If Nancy could come along with me, we would take three associates and spouses (friends) to dinner. As a result, we were invited to weddings, received the first baby pictures and we got to know the associates on a new level.

Encourage your partners to take associates and their spouses to dinner. When partners get to know associates on that personal level, a sense of trust is developed and loyalty is created.

Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles are authors of a book titled "Raving Fans." It is a great book on client service. At Jenkens some of our offices gave "Raving Fans" awards to members of their staff who had provided as well for examples of extraordinary client service that made our clients "Raving Fans." Our awards usually centered on a vacation to a place our staff members would not likely be able to afford, or at least would not likely spend the money. I often thought we should recognize associates in the same way. I also thought we should recognize associates for their pro-bono work or their community service.

Some firms do not have associate retreats and some firms have associate retreats that are not meaningful to the associates. Include associates in the planning process. Find out topics they think are important and bring in great speakers to address them. Provide lots of networking time so associates from different offices get to know each other. Provide recreational activities that are unique and fun.

Have clients who appreciate the firm's work come in and speak to associates. In addition to the client expressing appreciation, have the client let them know what the firm's work has meant to the company and how it has enabled the company to serve the public.

Most lawyers my age learned the art of lawyering by shadowing senior lawyers. In this day of billable hours, only a few firms encourage shadowing. Every associate I have ever known wants the opportunity to watch a senior lawyer on a matter on which the associate has worked. Encourage partners to take associates with them where there are learning opportunities.

Many associates only get feedback during their annual reviews and the only feedback they get is negative. Associates want real time feedback. Encourage partners to give feedback more frequently, especially good feedback.

Give health club/fitness memberships if you do not have a fitness facility in your office.

Finally when you tell associates how much they are appreciated let them know how they are making a contribution that is meaningful to clients and to their community.