

## GROOMING FUTURE LEADERS FOR LEGAL CAREERS IN MANAGEMENT

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Finding and [grooming the potential leaders](#) in your law firm or corporate legal department is not just a matter of promoting young associates based on their education or legal career experience. It takes work to identify, develop and nurture the legal career of promising leaders among your staff. And given the onset of baby boomer retirements, discovering and developing the next generation of legal managers is more important than ever.

But which characteristics separate the best potential leaders from the rest? And what can you do today to help up-and-coming stars become great legal managers? Here are some answers and strategies:

### **Look for certain qualities**

Certainly, legal managers must have a strong command of the law. But soft skills are crucial, as well. In a recent [Robert Half Legal survey](#), 45 percent of attorneys said that good judgment was the most important attribute for leaders, aside from legal knowledge. Those surveyed also noted collaboration skills (22 percent), high ethical standards (14 percent) and diplomacy (14 percent) as vital to good leadership.

Be on the lookout for young attorneys who excel in those areas, as well as those who are strong communicators. Legal managers must have good communication skills to motivate employees, build morale and loyalty, solve problems with personnel, workflow and vendors, and resolve conflicts with employees and clients.

### **Hire with leadership in mind**

You don't have to limit your search for the next generation of legal managers to your current staff, though. You should keep your eye out potential leaders whenever you're hiring, even when the job opening is for an entry-level attorney or a summer intern.

When sifting through applications, look for candidates who've held leadership positions in legal and other environments; someone who served on the board of a college student organization or took a position in a volunteer group is likely to have some solid leadership experience. Then, during interviews, ask behavioral questions that point to candidates' leadership skills, such as "Tell me about a time you took the lead on a challenging project" or "Describe a time when you coached or mentored someone to a successful outcome." The answers should help you spot candidates who have the potential to become legal managers.

## Invest in training

Once you've identified future leaders, encourage them to attend [continuing legal education \(CLE\) conferences](#) and courses. Managerial candidates should go to CLE seminars focusing on professional ethics, conflict resolution and growth management. In addition, they should polish and strengthen their knowledge of legal trends like [eDiscovery](#), cloud-based [legal research](#), cyber security, predictive coding, and artificial intelligence through classes and other training.

Also, make sure you're giving young attorneys a chance to shore up their weaknesses through targeted training. Some people are brilliant with processes and workflows, but do not have a healthy relationship with their coworkers. Others are motivational and inspirational, yet falter when it comes to time management, deadlines and follow-up. If candidates for management aren't equally strong in both project and people skills, recommend the appropriate professional development.

## Build a mentoring program

So many of the soft skills required for a thriving legal career — good judgment, decision making, teamwork, collaboration, conflict resolution, adaptability and client relations — are not taught in a classroom. They're learned on the job, and one effective way to make sure potential legal managers are developing these skills is to match them with an experienced mentor.

Formal mentoring programs for junior and mid-level employees can be one-time meetings during which a tenured attorney passes on knowledge or advice (otherwise known as flash mentoring) or long-term relationships, depending on the mentor and mentee's goals.

If your company doesn't have an in-house mentoring program, you should strongly consider starting one. Besides the obvious benefit of guiding a young professional's legal career, mentoring often has other positive effects: for example, [reverse mentoring](#), where knowledge percolates up the hierarchy; and better intergenerational dynamics, particularly between baby boomers and [Generation Z](#).

Identifying and developing future legal managers in your firm or company can be a challenge. But if you invest the time and energy into succession planning today, you'll reap the benefits of your efforts for years to come.

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