

# STATE OF THE INDUSTRY: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RECRUITING AND PD PROFESSION IN LAW FIRMS

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In 2011, Wisnik Career Enterprises, Inc. (WCE) surveyed 294 law firm recruiting professionals and 77 PD professionals. Their feedback provided significant data. In this evolving market, it has become apparent that recruitment and PD professionals have to take responsibility for their own career development in order to remain valuable to their firms and ensure their career growth.

## INDUSTRY TRENDS

*There is growth.* Recently, there have been opportunities for upward movement within both professional development and recruiting departments. Surveys conducted by WCE throughout 2011 found that 37% of responding PD professionals and 57% of recruiters from firms across the U.S. reported being promoted and receiving a title change. Over the past two years, we observed that although many departments have decreased in size, firms still recognize and reward the talent they have in these functions.

*There is long-term potential.* As can be expected, directors and chiefs of both recruiting and PD departments consistently report having more legal career experience and having been with their current firms longer than those in other positions. Chiefs of PD departments responding to our survey have an impressive average of 14 years of legal PD experience along with over 7 years at their current firms. PD directors actually averaged a slightly longer firm tenure of 8 years. Not to be outdone, chiefs of recruiting average 18+ years in the field and almost 9 years at their firms. These long tenures illustrate both the investment of firms in their professionals and the commitment of professionals to the industry.

Salary growth goes hand in hand with experience; there are significant salary increases at each level. It is particularly interesting that salaries reported for similar levels in recruiting and PD were very consistent. (See the table accompanying this article.)

Our analysis showed that satisfaction with compensation also increases with seniority. At the coordinator level, 38% of PD and 42% of recruitment professionals were satisfied with their compensation. However, with seniority, compensation satisfaction levels increased dramatically – 72% of PD and 61% of recruiting directors felt fairly compensated.

According to our surveys, senior professionals put in significantly more hours than their junior counterparts. PD coordinators reported working a weekly average of 45.5 hours, compared to their chiefs, who averaged 53.5 hours. Recruiting coordinators worked an average of 46.2 hours, while chiefs reported working 50.1 hours per week. Senior-level professionals, while reporting more hours worked per week, also reported significantly higher compensation satisfaction levels. The question that comes to mind is whether satisfaction increases as a result of compensation or if it is reflective of one's responsibilities and impact on the firm.

*Education differences:* One of the most common questions asked of WCE is whether a JD is needed to perform at the highest levels and to be promoted within legal recruitment and professional development functions. Based on our survey results, only 10% of all recruiting professionals have JDs, whereas 38% of all PD professionals reported having a JD. In our experience of conducting high-level recruitment searches, it

is very rare that such a job requires the candidate to have earned a JD. In searches for high-level PD professionals, however – especially for director or chief positions – a JD is often required of candidates. Our theory is that a JD and experience practicing law helps PD professionals with curriculum development, whereas a JD is not viewed as a prerequisite in recruiting.

## CORE COMPETENCIES

Being a valued asset – landing a new job or being promoted – requires acting strategically and owning one's own professional development. To that end, WCE developed industry Core Competency Models to help legal professionals identify and build on skills integral to their career success. Each model reflects the unique traits and behavioral competencies for each profession at different career levels. Because both departments have a strategic and integrative focus, there are some broad similarities between the competencies of PD and recruitment professionals. In essence the most valuable recruiting and PD professionals are those who can align their department's goals with their firm's big-picture mission and be a vital link between their department, firm management, and internal and external clients.

The Core Competencies WCE defined for legal recruitment and PD professionals are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

*Be professional.* One competency included in both models is professionalism. Behavioral evidence of this competency includes inspiring trust in one's firm leaders. Recruiters and PD professionals who invest in learning the firm's business and economics are better able to anticipate

changes and the needs of the firm. In today's rapidly changing business environment, this means being aware of what clients expect and then implementing initiatives to hire and develop legal talent to meet these needs.

*Be a liaison.* Another important competency across both models is the ability to establish productive work relationships. Effective communication is the key component of creating work relationships that are based on trust and respect. For recruiters, this competency is called building relationships and for PD professionals we call it interpersonal skills. Most legal professionals know how to communicate well, but the ones who are most successful have mastered being the liaison between disparate points of view. These professionals are able to articulate the needs and goals of their department *within* the framework of the firm's larger goals.

*Be flexible.* Flexibility and adaptability have always been important to legal professionals. However, within a constantly changing terrain, the demand for professionals to take on new responsibilities and be creative problem solvers is increasing. Organization and planning, one competency WCE defined for legal recruitment professionals, means more than just scheduling and maintaining order. It is about being able to anticipate possible changes and then preparing to re-plan. Likewise, the PD competency of project management includes using PD tools to meet firm needs in new and creative ways. Legal career professionals must be able to think and plan strategically, as well as to anticipate needs and adapt.

## IN SUMMARY

As the survey data reveal, many departments are smaller today than they were two years ago. Yet, the expectations from firm leadership for recruitment and professional development have expanded. Today, it is critical that legal career professionals understand the economics of their firm, as well as who the firm's clients are and

what they expect. To be a long-term success in these fields one needs to acquire the competencies necessary to be a valuable asset and play a strategic role. WCE's goal in creating the Core Competency Models and sharing industry trends is to provide legal recruitment and PD professionals with a roadmap so that they can take responsibility for their own career growth. ■

*To receive additional information on Wisnik Career Enterprises, Inc.'s Core Competency Models for professionals in legal recruiting and professional development, email me at [ewisnik@wisnik.com](mailto:ewisnik@wisnik.com).*

### RECRUITING AND PD AVERAGE SALARY BY LEVEL

	Recruitment	Respondents*	Professional Development	Respondents*
Coordinators	\$65,450	98	\$64,333	12
Managers	\$103,130	96	\$110,781	24
Directors	\$175,250	41	\$195,500	16
Chiefs	\$294,167	5	\$291,500	5

\* Not all respondents provided salary data.

FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2

