

The 5 Biggest Mistakes You Can Make As A Lateral

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Howard Kailes

Joining a new firm can seem like the perfect marriage, but attorneys can sully that relationship or blow it up altogether by failing to do their due diligence before jumping aboard and making other key missteps.

Not making sure to understand a firm's culture before sealing the deal is just one potential pitfall. Missing opportunities to jell with colleagues, failing to have patience for hiccups in the transition, and failing to deliver on their promises are all surefire ways to torpedo what might otherwise be a perfect match between the new firm's platform and the lateral's book of business.

Here, experts share the most common mistakes that lawyers make when joining a new firm and how to avoid them.

Not Fulfilling Expectations

One easy way for laterals to get off on the wrong foot is to oversell the amount of business they will be bringing with them, according to Garber.

"Walking through the door, you pretty much have a target on your back to meet those figures," Garber said.

Laterals should offer realistic, not wildly optimistic, figures so high expectations don't lead to big disappointment, according to Garber.

Laterals can also create friction when they don't fulfill the overarching purpose behind a firm's decision to bring them on.

The firm may have viewed the lateral as a way to simply increase business volume or, in some instances, add expertise in a novel area, according to Howard Kailes, a partner with McCarter & English LLP who chairs the firm's growth committee.

"If someone transitions in and the main objective is to augment the volume of activity but the attorney misperceives his role and instead thinks he's there to augment the expertise, there is a disconnect in objectives between the attorney and the firm," Kailes said.

Pushing for Change Without Consensus

Firms often see laterals as a way of adding fresh ideas and perspectives. However, a new partner should be wary of pursuing large-scale changes without first understanding the culture of a firm and how it conducts business, according to Garber.

"Attorneys who don't do things the old-fashioned way and are innovative and creative and energetic and industrious are what we really would like to see, and that's the reason we may have transitioned them in laterally," Kailes said.

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