

# The Pros and Cons of Hiring From Large Law Firms



Smokeball's **Law + The Great Resignation** survey found 30% of firms have increased hiring from large law firms since 2020. When big law candidates move to firms with 30 or fewer people — the group we surveyed — they bring unique experience and expectations with them.

"Lawyers go to large firms to get training and exposure to big cases and complex deals," says Michele Fivel, partner at legal recruiting firm Major, Lindsey, & Africa. Big law associates work with highly skilled practitioners and learn how to operate in high-pressure environments while developing time-management skills.

Here's what your firm needs to know about bringing in hires accustomed to a large-scale environment — and how best to set them up for success.

## Experience Can Help and Hurt

Along with multitasking capabilities and coolness under stress, candidates from large firms generally know how to work quickly and communicate clearly, says Lily Y. Hughes, assistant dean of career services at Syracuse University College of Law.

Often, associate-level hires also "have more of a foundation with systems, procedures and policies," says Mark O'Mara, founder of O'Mara Law Group in Orlando, Fla. Small firms, he says "horribly lack" this crucial skillset, offering large-firm hires an opportunity to make an immediate impact at their new workplace.

Those skills are also in line with large-firm candidates' reason for applying in the first place. Smokeball's survey found 82% of firms who significantly increased hiring from larger firms also say those candidates sought a challenge or different responsibilities. At firms with 30 or fewer people, large-firm hires gain hands-on opportunity the ability to specialize in a specific area and develop a deep competency and affinity for your firm's practice areas.

However, Fivel says, these hires usually "don't know how to litigate and have never tried a case," creating an immediate learning curve. Autonomy and hands-on litigation are a prime selling point for candidates, but you'll need to ensure proper training, supervision and mentorship on skills like interacting with clients.

## Salary Expectations Can Be Offset

The higher salaries at big law often allow associates to pay down their student loan debt and support a mortgage and family, so the decreased salary that often comes with leaving that grind can be tough to swallow. However, associates of any age considering a move to a smaller firm do so with a trade-off in mind: a better life-work balance.

Smokeball's survey found that large-firm candidates are more likely to request a hybrid work schedule when coming to smaller firms. However, Fivel says, most candidates are not seeking entirely remote schedules since they recognize the value of face time with decisionmakers.

In addition to hybrid scheduling, hires from large law firms tend to expect generous PTO and a lower-pressure environment to compensate for the smaller financial payout. But their salary and bonus expectations are still often higher than those of associates making a lateral move — so if you're seeking these candidates, build some flexibility into your budget.

## Mindset Management

While large firms produce lawyers who know how to produce billable hours, those associates often, "have a big firm mentality that keeps them rigid, while smaller firms require more flexibility," O'Mara says. He's found these attorneys' expectations can be too structured, and they may have difficulty adjusting to a variable environment.

Large-firm hires may not be practiced in dealing with understanding the needs of small-firm clientele. Shifting from representing corporations and higher net worth clients to working with smaller businesses and community members requires an understanding of each client's unique needs.

## Invest in Post-Hire Training

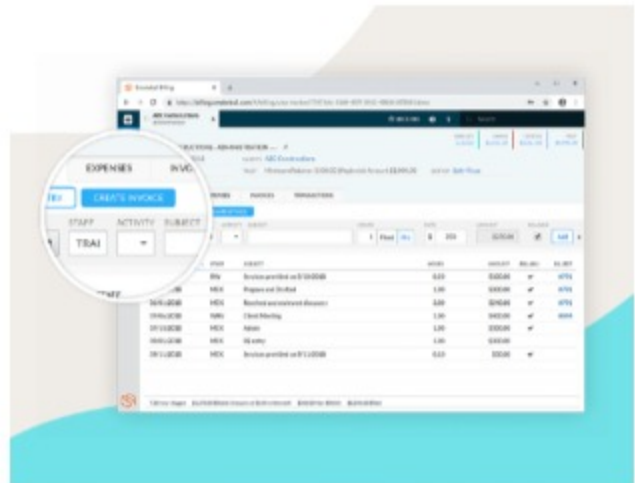
Although it's important to invest time in the hiring process, the post-hire period is key to success for an employee transitioning from a large firm to a small or medium firm. Dedicating time for training and mentorship is essential in helping them adjust to your firm.

O'Mara holds staff meetings at least once a week via Zoom to remain hands-on with his new hires. He stresses that ongoing open communication is essential for a successful transition. It's also crucial to provide a way for employees to air grievances, either through HR or an anonymous suggestion platform, so problems are handled as they emerge.

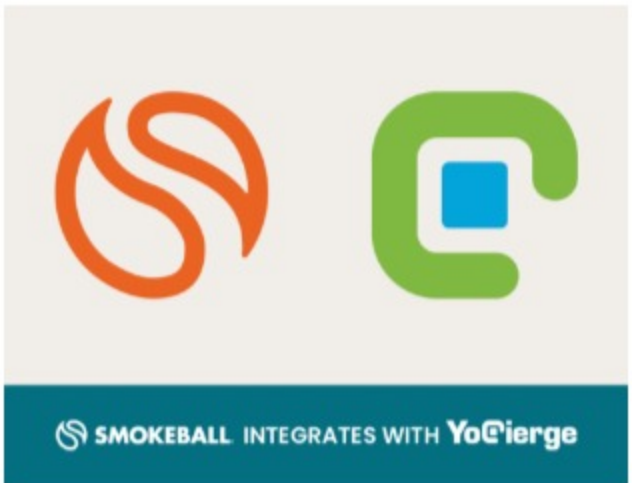
Hires from large firms can be a major asset to your firm if you are aware of the gaps in their experience and help them transition to a different type of law practice.

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