



THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE LEGAL RECRUITMENT PROCESS



WHERE LAW FIRMS COME
TO RECRUIT LEGAL TALENT

In a competitive, skills-short marketplace, there's zero room for error when it comes to recruiting.

If you want to land the top talent into your law firm, you need to get the process right: first time.

Planning a foolproof recruitment procedure takes time - and carrying it out takes even longer.

But it's crucial to recognise that the time and effort invested in the recruitment process directly relates to not only the quality of employee you get as a result but how long they are likely to stay with you.

So, where do you begin?

This report aims to guide you through the full step-by-step process of recruitment to ensure you make the right decisions and take the right action at the right time.

1. Before you begin

Before we dive into the process itself - I know it's tempting to rush straight into hiring if your legal employee has announced they're leaving - but it's worth taking some time to consider these three points before you begin planning your hiring strategy.

Check Your Employer Brand

Firstly, acknowledge that your employer brand matters here. But what is your employer brand? Did you even know you had one?

Your employer brand is the way you differentiate your law firm from others in the marketplace – enabling you to recruit and retain the best people.

A strong brand will help you compete in a competitive marketplace and establish you as credible. It reflects your company culture, connects your company's values and approach to its employees, and must be authentic.

Check Your Company Culture

Make no mistake; company culture is a crucial decision-making factor for today's job hunter.

The essential considerations for many jobseekers are inclusive and transparent company culture, diversity and inclusion, two-way communication between employer and employees and the right 'fit' in terms of the ethos of the law firm they are entering – so your mission, goals and aspirations match their own.

Finding your USP will enable you to promote your Employer Brand and secure the right candidate for the post.

Check Your Offer

We're not talking about salary here.

There's a growing realisation amongst employers that just having an excellent salary offer isn't enough anymore.

Candidates are looking for much more than that. Apart from checking out your employer brand – they will want to have a package offer that speaks to them in terms of how they can work when they can work, and what other perks are included in the job offer.

This includes such things as working from home, flexible hours, the chance to work at different locations and with other departments in a challenging and productive environment, with added extras such as healthcare, gym membership or profit-sharing scheme, as well as a clearly defined career pathway.

Inspired by Millennials and Gen X, the demand is high for benefits such as excellent company culture, flexible working and other perks.

So, ask yourself how your law firm meets these expectations. What can you offer that will persuade candidates to want to work for you rather than another law firm?

Your USP should be woven into your job spec and advert to appeal to those candidates you are hoping to attract.

So, armed with a great brand, culture and offer, you are now ready to consider the job vacancy itself.

2. Documenting the Vacancy

The Job Role

In my experience, clients often believe that the job spec they used for the last employee can be used for the new job search. This just isn't the case.

An old job spec with a list of dry-sounding duties and responsibilities isn't going to appeal to today's candidates who are looking for more challenging, exciting opportunities to advance their knowledge, experience and career.

So, if the role you are wanting to fill is an existing one, recently vacated by another employee, it's worth going over your job spec and making sure not only that the requirements are still relevant, but that it considers all duties and responsibilities of the role as they are now, and is appealing to potential employees.

If it's an existing role, do you want to add something new into the job? Have advancements in IT, AI or other factors come into play since the post was last advertised?

If you are creating a new position, you will need to invest some time in thinking about what you want the job to cover, what sort of candidate would make the perfect employee and other details such as salary, hours, location, etc.

So, before you start looking for your future employee; plan and gather information about the role.

The Person Spec

Do you have a person spec? I'm always surprised if clients don't have one of these as it's a crucial part of the vacancy description.

Choosing the right person is about more than listing tasks you will want them to do – it's a 360 degree look at their skills (soft and hard), qualifications (e.g. a degree), experience (time in your sector in a similar role) and attitude (alignment and understanding of your company ethos) that will enable you to pinpoint the ideal person for your company.

So, your person spec should list all the essential points you require (such as qualification, job-specific skills, experience, whether or not you want a graduate, someone who's worked in your sector before, etc.) and a list of desirable skills (managerial or leadership experience, IT qualifications, knowledge of software packages etc).

Your desirables list is your opportunity to go beyond the confines of the job as it currently stands and think about where it could go – so including skills that would be 'nice to have' – but don't let it turn into a random wish list of everything you can think of!

It should still be realistic within the legal sector and achievable (with training) and, most importantly, should be in line with the salary you are offering. Then you can plan a timeline for the process.

A well-planned schedule set at the very beginning will help make the recruitment process run smoothly. It should include details of agreed deadlines for:

- closing date for applications
 - applications review
 - who is to progress and who is to be rejected
 - dates for telephone screening, first and second interview dates
 - providing feedback to candidates after each stage
 - the target date for making a job offer
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Other things to take into consideration include the likely notice the successful candidate will have to work – will you need interim or temporary support between the existing member of staff leaving and your new team member of joining? If so, you could consider working with a specialist recruiter to help you facilitate this.

3. Writing the Advert

At this point, you may wish to consider if you have the time and skills to recruit directly, or whether you should bring in professional recruiters (more on this later!) If you are preparing the advert yourself, remember that the job advert may be the first contact a potential employee has with your law firm, so you want it to be a positive one.

The essential checklist you will need for the job description itself is:

- Job title
- Salary
- Location
- Intro to the business
- Role and responsibilities
- Essential requirements (i.e. qualifications and skills)

Take the time to make sure your language is appropriate to the level of job, and that you include an engaging opener.

And talking of language, it's crucial to ensure the language used in the advert is gender-neutral, as the impact of gender-biased words can attract or repel candidates.

Make sure you've clarified whether applicants should fill in an online form, a CV and covering letter, and any other information you require. It's a good idea to have a contact telephone and email on the job advert for further information – in case they want to clarify anything further before applying.

And don't forget to include your deadline!

4. Tapping into a Talent Pipeline

Have you considered how to make contact with potential passive candidates? Or headhunting?

It may be that you have a talent pipeline already in place, built from candidates who applied to previous vacancies but were not successful on that occasion.

If not, working with a recruiter will enable you to tap into their talent pipeline and secure both individuals who are actively looking for work and passive candidates.

5. Managing the Candidates

So far, so good. You've got some promising candidates who are attracted to your appealing vacancy and keen to work for you.

But checking CVs and applications can be a lengthy process in itself if not planned well. It's critical to ensure a timely plan for processing applications, or you will run the risk of candidates going elsewhere.

A recruiter can help you speed up this process with their contacts (see above) – so it may be worth considering working with a recruiter if you're likely to struggle with the timeframe here.

It's essential to follow a crib sheet to ensure you give all candidates a fair chance by marking them against the same criteria.

When you're scheduling, ensure that everyone taking part has cleared diary space. Remember, you will need time not only for the interviews but for the selection process afterward.

Allocate an employee to 'meet and greet' candidates and to coordinate any tests such as competency-based tasks or presentations.

Remember to book the rooms you will need and allow space in your schedule for breaks for the interviewing team.



Interview Styles

There are various types of interview, which include the following:

- **Structured:** formal, organised, series of questions regarding the post and candidate's experience.
- **Unstructured:** informal, open-ended questions, more conversational
- **Stress:** For high-level, stressful roles, e.g. Solicitor aims to gauge your reaction to pressure
- **Behavioural:** based on the belief that past performance is the best predictor of future behaviour: questions are designed to see how a candidate's previous experiences might affect their behaviour in similar situations in the future.
- **Problem Solving:** used to test analytical and communication skills
- **Panel:** Similar to a structured format, but with several staff present asking questions or observing

It very much depends on your law firm's preference and the particular job role that determines the interview style. Something you may want to take a look at is Drexel University format which offers an in-depth look at each of these interview styles.

Candidate Profiling

Many interviews include candidate profiling techniques. These tests can be behavioural, capability related or psychometric. They are aimed at determining personal proficiencies in an individual and, sometimes, how they will potentially react with other team members.

These tests give an individual a score or type definition, which the employer can use as a marker to gauge 'fit' into their existing team. Behavioural testing determines personality – what working style they have, their general behaviour, and how they interact with others.

Capability tests, or Aptitude tests, are used to test practically if an individual has the skill set to do the role successfully. An example of this is verbal or numeric reasoning. Psychometric testing is growing in popularity and is similar to behavioural testing but in much more depth. This test looks to uncover core values and beliefs. MyersBriggs and DISC are two popular tests in this category used by many employers.

How To Choose

Alongside profiling results, interview evaluation forms or scoring cards are freely available on the internet, or you can devise one specifically for your own law firm.

Rejecting Unsuitable Candidates

It's unwise to reject a candidate out of hand if they are professional and have the right skills and traits you look for in general. Consider retaining them in your talent pipeline if you can – then if another role becomes available that may be a good fit for them, you will already have someone in mind – saving you time and money.

Providing Interview Feedback

Feedback from the interview should be prompt and professional. If a candidate requests feedback, it's worth taking the time to provide personalised, constructive feedback, as there is ample evidence that a dissatisfied candidate will often reject a brand as a consumer.

Feedback will help them in future role applications elsewhere, but it can also mean that they will remember your law firm interview as a positive experience and may well apply for another role with you in the future, or tell their colleagues about it in a positive manner.



6. Managing the Offer

Once you have a successful candidate in mind, make an oral offer to them as soon as you can.

Remember that the candidate may still be actively job seeking and attending other interviews.

You don't want to dither only to find that your ideal employee has taken up another offer in the meantime. Also, bear in mind that a verbal offer is legally binding.

The contract of employment should be drawn up and sent to the new employee within a few days. It should specify how you will take up references, as well as proof of additional requirements such as DBS check.

How to Handle a Counteroffer

If the candidate comes back with a counteroffer, you will need to think through your options carefully.

Remember, employees, don't necessarily stay with a company that makes them a counteroffer. And they almost certainly won't if it's only salary-related.

It's worth reiterating to your candidate the benefits of moving to your company offers. Don't dwell on salary but on the culture, they will enjoy; the perks such as flexible hours, the training programmes you offer and, most importantly, the clear career progression route they will have.

All these could be deciding factors.

You don't want to lose your ideal new hire, but if they aren't prepared to move for the additional positives of working for you, then it's likely they wouldn't have stayed long anyway.

Handling a counteroffer can be notoriously tricky, and this is where you will find working with a recruitment company pays dividends (more on this later).

Candidate Management During the Notice Period

Let the new hire know how important they are to you and welcome them into the team. This could be something as simple as keeping in touch with your law firm's newsletter, so they are up to date on all news when they arrive on their first day.

Additionally, you could ask the team to make contact in advance via LinkedIn, so the newcomer feels they already know their colleagues when they start work. First-day nerves can be bad enough without a host of unfamiliar faces and names to contend with.

7. Onboarding

Finally, the day dawns when your new talented employee starts work. But this is no time to rest on your laurels.

It's crucial as part of your hiring process to remember to onboard correctly. Otherwise, all your time in attracting the new member of staff could be in vain.

Top employer brands including Google, Facebook, IBM, EY and Zappos have transformed their onboarding approach due to the significant impact on their firm's employer brand image (LinkedIn Business).

The onboarding time is a period that will play a pivotal role in the initial perception of your company, and consequently, influence the level of loyalty the individual has to the law firms.

Many new employees leave their role in the first few months due to poor onboarding.

According to Forbes, there is a strong correlation between onboarding and unwanted employee turnover. For example, nearly all low-turnover firms (95%) have an onboarding process that helps with retention. In contrast, 20% of high-turnover firms do not have an onboarding process.

The First Day

Some employers ask their new starter to come in a little later on the first day. This allows you to ensure that everything is ready – desk, PC or laptop, phone, stationery, parking permit, locker key, and whatever else they may need. These small practicalities can make all the difference to your employee feeling welcomed into the company, or not.

Think about how you would feel if there wasn't a desk for you on your first day! (it happened to a colleague of mine once).

Introductions will be made to the immediate team, but you may want to consider introducing some senior staff too (or let them introduce themselves – even better) It need only take a few moments but will make the new employee feel valued, planting a seed of loyalty from the start.

Also, on the first day, it's a good idea to start going through the job with the employee. Committing time to enable them to transpose into the team seamlessly with pay dividends – employees who have a good grasp on their duties and expectations from the get-go will quickly become productive members of their team.

Additionally, a lack of clarity on a role can lead to dissatisfaction as your employee will have no sense of direction.

The First Few Months

A thorough onboarding process will include a detailed training plan. This will enable you to be sure that

your new employee is fully conversant with the role and has all the training they need to carry out tasks allotted to them. It also provides an opportunity for you, or the employee, to bring to light any need for additional skills training. Alongside longer-term goals, including milestone achievements, will keep you on track and provide the opportunity to celebrate along the way.

The Future

Your commitment to your new employee doesn't terminate after the first few months! An ongoing commitment to lifelong learning and investment, alongside regular performance reviews, provide powerful tools. They act as a two-way conversation offering both employee and employer the opportunity to discuss further training, problems in the workplace. They also offer an excellent place to acknowledge a job done well. Just ensure that your feedback is always positive and constructive, and most of all, relevant.

8. Downfalls of a Bad Hire

Let's take a minute to reflect on the critical nature of good onboarding – and what happens if you get it wrong.

The cost of a bad hire doesn't just take its toll financially, although a CareerBuilder survey reported that the average cost of a bad hire is around \$7,000 - \$10,000 but the cost of a single bad hire reported by 41% of companies was around \$25,000 (around £20,000), and for managerial positions it can be as high as \$40,000 (around £33,000).

Additional downsides include:

- Increased turnover – hire a poor manager, and your employees will leave – studies have shown that over 80% of employees quit directly because of other employees. Additionally, if a new employee doesn't feel part of the team, they will probably leave soon after being hired. In 2018 survey of employees who left their new position within the first 90 days, 32% said the reason was that they didn't fit in with the company culture.
- Low morale – the wrong individuals in a team can result in decreased motivation, loyalty, productivity and ultimately, profitability.
- A drop in teamwork – Cooperation with colleagues, is a critical part of any successful law firm. A hire who doesn't fit in with the company culture and who other colleagues find challenging to work with will soon see a drop in teamwork.
- Reputation damage – the negative impact of the above downsides can go so far as to affect the law firm's image and reputation. Once your reputation is damaged, you'll have difficulty attracting new talent to your law firm. Additionally, hostile or rude employees will damage the chances of repeat business and recommendations from clients, further impacting on the law firm's reputation in the marketplace.

So, it's crucial to get your recruitment process right to make sure you have a great hire who fits into your law firm.

9. The Simple Way to Streamline Your Hiring Process

If you've read this far, you are maybe feeling exhausted at the many steps successful recruiting entails.

But fear not, because there is one simple thing you can do to ease the process.

Hiring and training new employees can be an expensive business, so naturally, you want to streamline the process. Rather than tying up your staff in lengthy tasks to find the right candidate, you could work with a recruitment agency who can take some of the weight off your shoulders.

“What are the benefits of working with a recruitment agency?” I hear you ask. Well, firstly a recruitment company such as Clayton Legal has many years' experience of recruiting to your sector.

Recruiters can speed up the whole process – they have many contacts in the sector, including active candidates, passive candidates and a well-developed talent pipeline.

They will often have someone suitable in mind straight away for your vacancy. Think of the time you could save!

At the very least, you can be confident that the candidates they send for an interview will all be eminently employable, whichever you choose. Recruiters would never suggest individuals to you to make up the numbers – a recruiter's reputation hangs on the quality of their candidates.

A good recruiter will also work with you and your law firm to write a job spec, person spec and interview questions, will be able to handle initial interviews (leaving you to select from a final handful) and will work with you to onboard your chosen hire.

Here at Clayton Legal, we can help focus your interview efforts on the right candidates and remove the margin of doubt that many hiring managers come across when they have mixed feelings about a candidate.

We understand that it is often the last stages of the recruitment process that are the trickiest – you have two great candidates and are unsure which one will be the best hire.

Sounds too good to be true.

If you're looking to make the ideal hire, contact Clayton Legal today and see how we can help you with your recruiting process from start to finish.

CLAYTON LEGAL

We understand that while talent is your greatest asset - it can also be your scarcest resource - which is why you need a recruitment partner with the market expertise, insight and network to deliver the right people at the right time.

Clayton Legal has been partnering with law firms across the country since 1999 and during that time has built up an enviable reputation for trust and reliability.

We provide an experienced and credible voice in the market by being able to demonstrate a detailed knowledge of the legal sector's talent agenda. Talent is all about people and just like you, our consultants are true experts in their field with a real drive for excellence which informs everything they do.

From Partners and Associates through to Solicitors, junior fee earning positions and support staff, Clayton Legal is the only name you'll ever need - and what's more - we are nice people to do business with!

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Keep up to date with the very latest industry news and insight, by connecting with us on our social channels:





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