

## Appealing to a New Generation

One firm takes on the issue of fickle associates by rethinking the summer experience.

BY JAMES N. BIERMAN  
AND RICHARD A. WEISS

From generation to generation those who have gone before are often heard proclaiming, “When I was your age . . .” Fill in the blank with the appropriate “life was much tougher” scenario. The typical response to such reminiscing is a groan or roll of the eyes from the intended audience and perhaps with good reason.

They would be right. We law firm partners are not doing any one any good by thinking about the way things were when we were first-year associates. Instead, what we must do is constantly evaluate the evolving needs of both clients and the lawyers who serve them. What better place to start than with summer associates, the future of our firm and the industry?

The entire process starts with recruiting for summer associates at Foley & Lardner, which is rigorous. After all, we hope we are making more than just a three-month investment. Ideally, a positive summer experience will lead to a full-time associate offer and for some even a commitment to stay with the firm long enough to make partner. But, here is where we may be getting ahead of ourselves.

We are part of a trend of law firms that recognize that in order to attract today’s law grads, we need to offer an experience that involves more than just a big name on a résumé. The newest crop of law graduates has a different set of priorities. Incoming associates may be willing to commit to a firm for a couple of years, but then many are looking for a lifestyle change. Realistically, they’re looking to learn, make connections, and pay off their debt. But many of these young lawyers are not expecting to be at their first firm for life nor even make partner there, for that matter.

The two of us have a combined record of more than 70 years of commitment to Foley. Our consultants tell us the average 2007 law school graduate will retire with a résumé packed with 10 to 12 different jobs. So here is the question we must ask: How do we attract this new generation of lawyers and keep them for at least a three-year tour?

Of the things that are important to rising law students, we have found that a three-pronged approach offering hands-on training, classroom extension, and the opportunity to provide pro

bono legal aid to those who cannot afford it serves our summer associates well.

### TRAINING, TRAINING, TRAINING

Summer associate positions are really a law student’s first taste of practical application.

Whether they join a firm between their first and second year, or between their second and third year, it is often their earliest exposure to client work. So, law firms are starting to emphasize the importance of building on their foundation of education with a hybrid experience that combines an extension of the classroom and actual practice.

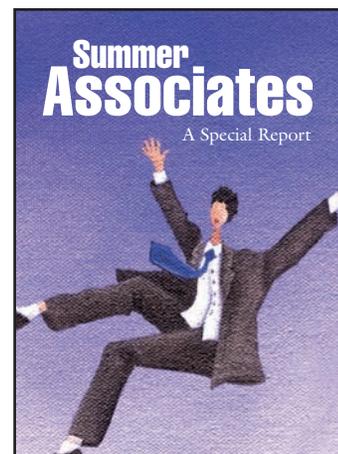
This newest generation of lawyers thrives on feedback and structure. At Foley, several times a month we provide summer associates with the opportunity to attend seminars developed by Foley and guest lawyers from a variety of practice areas across the country. Through video conferencing, summer associates attend sessions on a range of subject areas including intellectual property, business law, litigation, and regulatory law. These courses vary greatly in style, subject matter, and level. Some are a refresher of the basics the associates studied in law school. Others delve into the nuances of obscure specialties, according to their interests.

Furthermore, we build on our firm’s emphasis on partner attention throughout the year with a one-to-one partner-to-associate ratio, extending that mentoring environment to the summer associates.

### PROJECT CHOICE

At Foley, as with most firms across the country right now, our 160 summer associates are getting settled in at offices around the country and getting their assignments. Traditionally, law firms have favored a system that assigns these fresh faces to an area where they “think” their interests lie. We have a more progressive approach.

Full-time associates and partners post available projects on an intranet Web site, and summer associates select opportunities on



a first-come, first-served basis. We encourage the group to try assignments in areas they think they are interested in and some in which they think they specifically are not. The summer associates often find interests where they least expect them, and the program also creates a multi-tasking environment similar to the one they'll experience as a first-year associate, managing multiple projects at once.

A good example of a summer associate who benefited from this approach is Mariel Estigarribia, now a first-year associate in the transactional and securities practice in Foley's Washington, D.C., office. Before she went back to school for a law degree, Mariel was an investment banker. With her background, she thought the obvious fit would be to do restructuring and bankruptcy work in her summer associate position at Foley's Detroit office. But after working on high-level negotiations in a potential mergers and acquisitions deal over the summer, she decided she wanted to join Foley's business law group instead.

### PRO BONO

Foley was one of the founders of the Public Interest Law Initiative, an organization that facilitates the provision of pro bono services to legal aid organizations by law students and recent law school graduates.

The firm extends its commitment to serving the public good to the summer associates, assigning each individual to a non-profit case, where each summer associate works alongside full-time associates and partners on the matter. Depending on the complexity of the case, some associates will not be able to see their case all the way through to a decision. But we are confident that the experience will instill in them a desire to continue this rewarding work.

During Mariel's two summers with Foley, she says her work on a custody case involving a grandfather in inner-city Detroit left a major impression and inspired her to continue pro bono work in her full-time career. She also believes hands-on training

that she was afforded during the summer session at the firm was a key factor in her decision to accept a full-time position.

"It wasn't fodder or fluff. It wasn't: Go research this and write an article. We got a lot of client experience," Estigarribia says. "I was talking to clients directly as a summer associate, of course with supervision. That's probably what impressed me the most."

She now serves as a mentor for this year's class of D.C. summer associates, helping to offer perspective as a recent participant in the program.

At Foley, we have created an internal process to continually update and re-evaluate the summer associate program formula in an effort to attract the best pool of candidates. The best way for us to succeed is to give young law students what they are looking for because they have the talent to succeed if they like what they are doing.

The irony for any law firm, though, is that the better your associates, the more opportunities there are, and the harder it is to keep them.

That said, successful firms cannot operate under the premise of simply hiring great lawyers if they can only keep them for a matter of months. At Foley, we do not, nor will we ever, foster a revolving-door atmosphere. Quite the contrary: We strive to hire lawyers both young and experienced who will develop a long-standing relationship with the firm and its clients.

But we recognize that times are changing and this newest generation of lawyers has a different set of priorities. Our challenge at Foley & Lardner, as is the challenge at firms across the country, is to balance those priorities while we continue to offer high-caliber counsel. And we've found with the right approach that the two are not mutually exclusive.

---

*James N. Bierman is the chairman of Foley & Lardner's national recruiting committee, and Richard A. Weiss is the managing partner of the firm's Washington, D.C., office.*