

New Hires Tend To Have Real World Experience

Firms snap up former teachers, aerospace experts and chemists

By JAY STAPLETON

The fall hiring season has returned with renewed vigor, with some big law firms bringing in as many new fall associates as they did before the economic downturn.

One thing is noticeable: more of the new fall hires have prior professional experience and have been out of law school for a few years, as firms continue to seek candidates who fill specific staffing needs.

"A lot of the hiring is not back to the pre-recession madness, but it has rebounded," said Peter Giuliani, a Weston-based law firm economic advisor who works with 100-lawyer-plus law firms throughout the country. "I don't think the salaries have gone up much at all though."

These days, new hires are expected to know more than the average applicant fresh from law school. That means lawyers with strong internships, court clerkships or business experience are in highest demand. "There is a big inventory on the market of lawyers who have experience," Giuliani said.

Day Pitney, with offices in New York, New Jersey and Hartford, announced it has hired 16 new associates, including eight in Connecticut, which the firm said is its biggest fall associate class ever. Wiggin and Dana welcomed four new associates to its offices in New Haven and Stamford. Shipman & Goodwin brought in eight new associates, including many with useful past-work experience for its growing practice areas, including education and import/export law.

"What's exciting for us, is that the hiring is across all aspects of our law firm," Cantor said, listing IP sub-practice specialties like chemistry, electrical engineering and computer sciences. "What that means," Cantor said, "is we are growing across the board, which I think bodes well for the health of our law firm."

"The talent pool was exceptional in 2012 and many things differentiated these hires," said Karen Staib, partner and chair of the Hiring Committee for Shipman & Goodwin. Worth noting she said, was that "some previously held jobs within industries where we provide legal services."

One of the new hires is a former teacher who has joined the firm's education law practice. Another worked as an aerospace engineer before going to law school. "He will begin his legal career in our import/export compliance practice, servicing some of the world's largest defense and aerospace corporations and manufacturers," Staib said.

Experience Gaps

A factor fueling this hiring spree is that many large firms cut back their staffing levels in 2009 and 2010, especially with regard to newer associates, right after the economic downturn began in 2008. Law firms have since realized there is a gap between their staffing levels and their ability to keep clients happy.

"So now the firms are back out in the market, hiring laterally to fill experience gaps," Giuliani said. "That is what may be churning a little action in the recruiting market."

Day Pitney's hiring managers said three of the eight new lawyers in its West Hartford and Hartford offices had clerked for federal or state Supreme Court justices. Others had previous experience in business settings, including pharmaceutical and accounting firms.

Among the new group in its Hartford offices is a former scientist for a Fortune 100 pharmaceutical company and a former tax consultant for a Big Four accounting firm. The firm also hired a handful of former court clerks. Stanley A. Twardy Jr., Day Pitney's managing partner, said the fact that so many new hires came from business settings was no accident.

Indeed, he said, the priority in hiring was to fill client needs. "The wide-ranging work experience [of the new hires] will result in immediate and valuable contributions to the firm and our clients," Twardy said.

Bill Perrone, Wiggin and Dana's hiring

partner, said he looks for lawyers with both top academic credentials and business experience. Among the educational attributes that would put someone on top of Perrone's résumé pile is training in "biochemistry, accounting or computer science, to complement practice groups with a demonstrated need in those areas."

Likewise, Robinson & Cole continues to align "its staff and resources with our clients needs," as hiring partner Thomas Cody put it.

While the firm brought in one traditional fall associate, fresh out of law school and the firm's summer associate program, it also made two lateral hires for its construction, business and commercial litigation practice groups.

Those hires were made to provide those practice areas with more "depth," said Aileen Bastos, a spokeswoman for the firm.

Good Chemistry

At the highly specialized intellectual property practice of Cantor Colburn, the Hartford-based firm announced last week it was hiring a larger-than-usual group of six lawyers. The new hires include Lily Neff, counsel, who previously worked as a senior intellectual property attorney with IBM for 15 years and taught courses on patent law at the University of Connecticut School of Law.

Others who started in recent weeks with Cantor's Hartford office are experienced in science or technology. Dmitry Zuev, for example, was hired as a patent agent. Although he just graduated from the UConn law school in May, Zuev previously earned a Ph.D. in chemistry from Ohio State University.

Co-managing partner Michael Cantor said it's fairly standard for the firm to hire "with a specialty in mind...More often than not, [new hires] have real job experience. We generally don't hire people right out of law school."

He pointed out that the increased hiring this year at Cantor Colburn reflects more spending by corporations on patent and trademark work, as well as his firm's growing market share. "What's exciting for us, is that the hiring is across all aspects of our law firm," Cantor said, listing IP sub-practice specialties like chemistry, electrical engineering and computer sciences. "What that means," Cantor said, "is we are growing across the board, which I think bodes well for the health of our law firm."

While it's standard for an IP firm to look for highly specialized experience for the work it does, that trend of focusing on lateral hires with specific skills is becoming increasingly apparent at full-service firms as well.

In recent years, said Giuliani, many firms have been stung by the old practice of hiring right-out-of-law-school associates, only to lose them after a relatively short term to other firms or corporate counsel positions. "If you're hiring an experienced lawyer who's any good, the chance of getting that person into a paying position that's earning money for the firm will work out faster than with a new associate right out of law school," Giuliani said.

While there is an inventory of experienced lawyers looking for work, supply and demand factors have kept pay relatively flat. "There are people with two or

three years' experience that would die to get a starting salary job," Giuliani said.

Salaries were reportedly about the same or up modestly at some large firms with Connecticut offices, although many firms declined to reveal how much they are paying new associates.

Last month, the National Association for Law Placement released survey results which found that for the first time since 2007, less than half of the first-year associates at firms with 700 or more lawyers brought home top dollar, \$160,000 per year. At law firms of 251 to 500 lawyers, median salary increases were reported from \$125,000 to \$130,000.

Most of the firms that answered that survey indicated pay levels would remain steady for the recently graduated law school class of 2012. But at Day Pitney, hiring executives said the starting salary for first-year associates in the Connecticut office is \$120,000, up from \$110,000 in 2011.

At Shipman, like most firms, the starting pay varies in different offices. In Hartford, first-year associates are paid \$110,000. In Stamford, the starting salary is \$125,000. Associates in the Washington, D.C. office get \$145,000.

"Starting pay has been relatively the same over the past several years," Staib said. ■

