

How Law Firms Can Leverage Secondments and Reverse Secondments to Strengthen Client Relationships

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Building and maintaining strong client relationships is tantamount for law firms of any size. Secondments and reverse secondments have emerged as innovative strategies for achieving this goal, offering benefits for both law firms and their clients. These arrangements involve temporarily transferring employees between organizations, fostering a deeper understanding and collaboration. Secondments can be a valuable client development and client retention tool for law firms – when done right. Learn more about how to leverage secondments and reverse secondments and how to create a successful secondment program at your law firm.

Understanding Law Firm Secondments

A secondment involves a law firm sending one of its lawyers to work temporarily within a client's organization. This arrangement can last from a few months to over a year, depending on the agreement's specifics. The secondee lawyer continues to be employed by the law firm but works closely with the client's internal team, providing legal advice and services from within.

The Benefits of Secondments for Law Firms and Clients

- **Enhanced Understanding of Client Needs:** By working in-house, secondee lawyers gain an intimate understanding of the client's business, culture and specific legal needs. This insight allows the law firm to tailor its services more effectively.
- **Strengthened Relationships:** Secondments facilitate personal relationships between the law firm's staff and the client's team, leading to stronger, more trusting partnerships.
- **Business Development:** Law firms can showcase their expertise directly to the client, potentially leading to more business opportunities.
- **Professional Development:** Lawyers on secondment face unique challenges and learning opportunities, enhancing their skills and experience.

Enhancing Client Development and Retention through Secondments and Reverse Secondments

Secondments and reverse secondments offer unique advantages for law firms looking to deepen

client relationships and improve client retention. These programs serve as a strategic tool for client development by fostering a deeper understanding and alignment between law firms and their clients. Here's why they are beneficial:

1. **Builds Trust and Understanding:** By placing a secondee within a client's organization (or vice versa), law firms can gain insider insights into the client's business operations, culture and challenges. This firsthand knowledge allows firms to tailor their legal advice more effectively, thereby building trust and demonstrating their commitment to the client's success.
2. **Strengthens Relationships:** The close collaboration during a secondment facilitates personal connections between the firm's personnel and the client's team. These relationships can lead to stronger ties and loyalty, making clients more likely to retain the firm's services for future needs.
3. **Identifies New Opportunities:** Secondees often uncover unmet legal needs or areas where the client may require additional support, creating opportunities for the firm to offer relevant services. This proactive approach not only adds value to the client but can also expand the scope of work for the firm.
4. **Showcases Expertise:** Secondments are an excellent way for law firms to demonstrate their expertise and the quality of their lawyers in a real-world setting. By working closely with the client, secondees can directly showcase their skills, knowledge and value, reinforcing the firm's reputation as a key legal partner.
5. **Facilitates Knowledge Exchange:** These programs encourage a two-way exchange of knowledge, with secondees bringing back valuable insights and practices from the client's industry that can enhance the firm's legal strategies and services. Similarly, clients benefit from the legal expertise and perspectives that secondees contribute to their operations.
6. **Improves Service Delivery:** The deep dive into a client's business enables secondees to identify ways to streamline communication, improve efficiency and enhance the overall client experience. This can lead to more effective and client-centric service delivery, further boosting satisfaction and retention.
7. **Cements Long-term Partnerships:** By investing in secondments and reverse secondments, law firms signal their dedication to not just being a service provider, but a strategic partner invested in the client's long-term success. This commitment is crucial for nurturing enduring client relationships.

Incorporating secondment programs as part of a law firm's client development and retention strategy can provide a competitive edge, ensuring that clients feel valued, understood and well-supported. This approach not only enhances current engagements but also paves the way for sustained growth and collaboration.

The Concept of Reverse Secondments

In a reverse secondment, the flow is reversed; a client's employee, often from their legal or compliance department, is temporarily placed within the law firm. While less common than traditional secondments, reverse secondments offer unique advantages, including.

- **In-depth Legal Training:** The client's staff gains valuable legal experience and knowledge, which can be applied to their roles upon returning to the client organization.
- **Improved Legal Services:** Hosting a client's employee allows the law firm to better understand the client's expectations and how they utilize legal services, leading to improved service delivery.
- **Cementing Client Loyalty:** By investing in the development of a client's team, law firms can

further solidify their relationships and commitment to the client's success.

Implementing Successful Secondment Programs

For secondment and reverse secondment programs to be successful, clear agreements outlining the scope, duration, objectives and expectations from both sides are essential. In addition, law firms should ensure a smooth integration process for secondees, providing them with the necessary support and resources. Here are key steps and considerations to ensure the effectiveness of secondment programs:

- **Define Clear Objectives and Expectations:** Both the sending and receiving organizations must articulate the goals they aim to achieve through the secondment. These objectives could range from skill development, fostering innovation to enhancing partnership between entities – or a combination of these. Clear expectations regarding the secondee's role, responsibilities and contributions should be established to align with these goals.
- **Draft Comprehensive Agreements:** Legal agreements are crucial to outline the scope, duration, and specific terms of the secondment. These agreements should cover aspects such as confidentiality, intellectual property rights and the conditions under which the secondment can be terminated. They should also specify arrangements regarding the secondee's compensation, benefits, and any differential in pay.
- **Ensure Smooth Integration:** For secondees, moving to a new work environment can be challenging. Law firms and host organizations should facilitate a comprehensive orientation program to acquaint secondees with their new colleagues, corporate culture and operational procedures. This includes providing access to necessary tools, resources, and training to fulfill their new roles effectively.
- **Provide Continuous Support:** Assign a mentor or a contact person within the host organization who can offer guidance and support to the secondee throughout the duration of the program. Regular check-ins should be scheduled to address any concerns, monitor progress and ensure the secondee's well-being.
- **Establish Communication Channels:** Effective communication between the secondee, the host organization, and the sending firm is vital for the success of the program. This facilitates feedback exchange, helps in tracking the secondee's development and ensures that the objectives of the secondment are being met.
- **Measure Success and Gather Feedback:** Upon completion of the secondment, conduct a thorough review to assess whether the initial objectives were achieved. This should involve feedback from the secondee, their supervisors and any other relevant stakeholders. Insights gained from this process should be used to refine and improve future secondment programs.
- **Reintegration Plan:** Develop a plan for the secondee's return to the law firm, ensuring that they can effectively transfer the knowledge and skills acquired during their secondment. This may include debriefing sessions, sharing learnings with colleagues or integrating new practices within the firm.

Should Your Law Firm Try Secondments?

Secondments and reverse secondments are strategic opportunities for law firms to deepen client relationships, enhance service delivery and develop their lawyers' skills. By fostering a collaborative environment and offering mutual benefits, these arrangements can significantly contribute to a law firm's success and its clients' satisfaction. As the legal industry continues to evolve, adopting such innovative approaches will be key to staying competitive and meeting clients' ever-changing needs.

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