Value Practice Profile: Professional Development, Efficiency Task Force and Business Strategies Initiatives at McKenna Long & Aldridge

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Interviewed while Chairman

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McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP is an international law firm of 450 attorneys and public policy advisors with offices in ten U.S. cities and Brussels. The firm offers services in three broad categories: transactional, litigation and governmental and regulatory.

This profile focuses on McKenna Long's value-building efforts in three areas:

- Competency-based Professional Development Program
- Efficiency Task Force
- Business Strategies Services

Practices for Adding Value

Professional Development. The firm views the professional development of associates and partners as a very high priority both to increase the value of services provided to clients and to retain valuable associates and partners whose legal expertise and client knowledge represent a major asset of the firm.

- **Assessment Testing Period.** McKenna Long believes retention and professional development begin at the front end--effective recruiting. The firm has reengineered the way by which it interviews both entry level and lateral associates so as to better identify those candidates most likely to be successful at McKenna Long. Most significantly, the firm requires all candidates to take an assessment test that is used in identifying areas that may require deeper inquiry during the interview process. Additionally, for those candidates that join the firm the results of their assessment test are reviewed with them and used as the foundation of their personal professional development plan.
- **Leadership and Management of Development.** McKenna Long has a professional development function staffed by training and development experts who work with the firm's leadership and lawyers to develop and implement training and development programs. These professionals support all aspects of the development process. The firm's chairman directly oversees the implementation of professional development programs.
- **Core Competency Model.** The firm's model has five categories each of which includes specific competencies. The competencies are spelled out in four grade levels. The categories are:
    - ***Skills*** – Research & Analysis, Written Communication, Oral Communication, Advocacy/Negotiation, Professional Judgment

- ***Client Service*** – Client Relations, Client Management, Business Development
- ***Work Ethic*** – Work Management, Commitment & Initiative
- ***Interpersonal Traits*** – Teamwork & Cooperation, Delegation & Supervision, Responsiveness & Initiative, Character
- ***Firm Citizenship*** – Firm's Policies & Plans, Cross Organizational Collaboration, Non-Billable Involvement

This model provides associates with explicit guidance and understanding of the competencies the firm values most. Practice groups include additional competencies specific to their activities. Each associate is rated annually on the core competencies by at least three partners.

- **Career and Personal Development Plan (CPDP).** This process provides a road map for helping associates understand the factors that will influence their career success and enable them to take responsibility for their own development. The firm's team leaders have been charged with helping to manage the careers of associates through the CPDP process. This includes working with each associate to establish assignments, writing opportunities, speaking engagements, and/or training programs to ensure that each associate can achieve the core competencies required for their current performance level.
  - The CPDP process institutionalizes the review of career development so that both the firm and the individual have responsibility and accountability for achieving excellence. Also, it provides an open forum in which every associate can discuss career development goals and concerns with partners who are committed to helping the associate succeed.
- **Performance Review.** The firm uses the core competency model as the basis of performance reviews. This puts advancement and compensation increases in alignment with client requirements. The faster an associate masters the core competencies and fulfills the requirements, the quicker the associate qualifies for compensation increases and promotions. (The firm no longer uses the traditional class year "lockstep" approach to compensation and billing rates.)
- **Associate Academy.** Beginning this year, senior associates (levels 3 and 4) will participate in a two-day assessment and review program in which partners of the firm provide detailed and objective feedback. This feedback focuses attention on specific steps the associate needs to take to improve and qualify for promotion. Participants consider and discuss the specific experiences that associates have had, such as taking and defending depositions, sitting second chair in a trial, and coordinating discovery productions.

  This assessment process also serves to indicate that an associate is in the "home stretch" of the journey to become a partner and thus helps to motivate the associate to perform at an even higher level.

Efficiency Task Force. The firm recognizes that working more efficiently and controlling expenses are essential to providing greater value to its clients. The Efficiency Task Force, *comprising more than* *ten senior lawyers and firm management executives*, has the responsibility to identify and implement strategies for increasing efficiency. Examples of projects or initiatives implemented by the task force are:

- *More effective use of secretaries* by increasing their training and responsibilities to take on a greater role in helping lawyers and paralegals manage their projects and client relationships.
- *Expansion of firm extranets to clients* to create document repositories for projects so that firm staff and clients can more easily access these documents with less likelihood that multiple versions will be created on team members' PCs.
- *Use of talented part-time contract attorneys* on projects where the project scope and schedule enable the lawyers to work on the schedule they need while providing the service at an attractive hourly cost.
- *The growing use of non-lawyer professionals* to complete non-legal work on client projects at a lesser cost than would be required if lawyers were completing the work. Non-lawyer professionals often bring greater enthusiasm and specialized skills to project management and coordination tasks than do experienced lawyers who would rather be working on the substantive legal issues.

***Business Strategies Services*.** Three years ago McKenna Long developed a new approach to client service known as its Business Strategies Group. As described by the firm, the Business Strategies Group works with members of the firm to identify and develop innovative services and solutions for its clients. The group's mission includes fostering ideas for new services that give the firm's clients a competitive edge and creating new revenue opportunities for its clients. McKenna Long believes the services of its Business Strategies Group demonstrates the firm's focus on providing value to its clients by creating a total alignment of interest.

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