

Establish a Comprehensive, Long-Term Vision for Your Legal Team

By Princeton Legal Search Group, LLC

Long-term vision may have different definitions for different companies, but here are some statistics to frame the conversation:

*The interview process in America has grown by **3.3 to 3.7 days** since 2009. "Today it stands at **22.9 days on average.**" (Source: Glassdoor)*

***Eight months** is the approximate time it takes for a new employee to reach full productivity. (Source: Harvard Business Review)*

In our experience, an in-house legal department should expect a search for a lawyer to take a minimum of 60 to 90 days. It is not uncommon for searches to take longer, and this is impacted by challenges in scheduling interviews with key stakeholders, the need to build consensus around a new attorney hire and an organization's approval process for new hires. This, coupled with ramp-up time needed to achieve full productivity, highlights the need for a clear vision and a plan.

What will your legal team look like in five or 10 years? Although we can't recruit for the 10-year plan today, the context for the recruiting process is critical.

In a fast-moving world, a long-term plan guides your hiring by reinforcing your vision of where you are now and where you need to be. It also makes the company's goals clear to your current and future team.

That vision encompasses an assessment of your company's anticipated business trajectory, industry/marketplace projections, priorities and values—as well as the impact of those factors on the legal department. Having a long-term vision requires critical thought about how your company currently uses your legal department as well as an analysis and understanding of potential increased demand for your department's advice and counsel. It takes into account your legal team's current capabilities and the potential for current contributors to learn new skills and responsibilities. And it reflects an understanding of where gaps in talent exist.

Here are some questions you may want to ask during the planning process. While this may not be a complete list, it should get you started on a path and give you the foundation for additional questions:

- What core competencies and skills will you need today, tomorrow and beyond? What roles will business management, technological and other nonlegal expertise play?
- What changes or trends may impact the business? For example, are proposed mergers and acquisitions in the picture? What new or changing technologies might affect the business and your department? Is your organization growing organically or through acquisition? The answers will influence the type of lawyer you need to hire today and the talent you will need down the road.
- What legal competencies will you develop internally, compared with the cost-benefit analysis of purchasing law firm competencies or expertise? For example, some companies want their litigation work done in house, and other companies prefer that the heavy lifting for litigation be handled by outside law firms. What are your organization's preferences? What is the turnover in your legal department, and is it lower or higher than that of the rest of the organization? Do you know the organization's average turnover for professionals? How will you factor turnover into your succession planning?
- What is your current outside counsel spend? Are there pressures from management to reduce it? Often, such spending can be greatly reduced by hiring additional talent for your own legal department at a fraction of the cost.
- What does the succession plan look like for the existing C-suite or senior-level management team? Are there individuals who may be exiting the workforce, or have prescribed or term employment contracts? The answers will impact the types of core competencies, practice areas and skills you need today, compared with those needed in the future.
- What is your legal team's current makeup? Are there individuals who may be ready for a stretch assignment, promotion, additional responsibilities, special project or other changes? Can these individuals be positioned now for your future needs?

Look to the future to assist you in determining your needs for today as well as for the longer term. This approach will greatly aid you in the hiring process during both time frames.

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