

Know Your Legal Hiring Plan and Create a Proven Communication Strategy

By Princeton Legal Search Group, LLC

We often see situations where a legal team becomes insular and/or isolated from the larger management team. This can happen for a number of reasons, and the outcomes are generally not successful. Therefore, securing a buy-in from the senior management team about the need for additional legal talent is critical. Doing so will be helpful in the newly hired legal professional's onboarding, integration and success. The entire legal team will benefit as well.

Clear communication is essential.

The communication process becomes matrixed very quickly, and there are multiple ways and places for communication to become muddled. Your requirements for a new hire should be fully defined and embrace all of the following:

- **A detailed position description**
- **Reporting structure**
- **Compensation details: salary, bonus, equity and signing bonus**
- **Summary plan descriptions for benefits and 401(k) plans**
- **PTO, vacation and related items**
- **Relocation program**

Here are some questions you may want to ask:

- Who does my legal team serve? And from whom might I want buy-in when selecting the next legal professional?
- What will the interview process look like? And who will conduct the interviews? Support from key stakeholders will influence the process. Individuals who are part of the decision-making are more likely to be committed to the success of the selected candidate.
- How might you communicate with those who are not considered or are found not qualified for this particular position? This is a point where the process can get stuck or gain momentum. Team members will support the decision if they feel they have been considered and fairly evaluated.

- Once internal resources have been vetted, what might be your next steps? Will you engage with the human resources department and follow a protocol? Does HR understand the nuances of the legal requirements, your team and the organization? Does HR have access to the best legal talent in the marketplace and training in legal recruitment?
- There may come a time when you are not seeing lawyer candidates who meet your requirements. If that happens, how do you engage with a search partner to find such a candidate? Do you want to bring on a general search firm? Or do you want to engage with a niched practice, such as legal? Once you have decided, what is the approval process for the engagement?

If you have decided to engage with a search partner, you may want to ask these questions:

- How many in-house placements or searches has the search firm made and/or conducted?
- Does the search firm focus exclusively on recruitment of lawyers?
- Does the search firm have experience recruiting for other companies in your industry?
- What percentage of searches are successfully completed?
- How long has the search firm been in business?
- What are the terms of the search firm engagement agreement?

Once you are ready to proceed in earnest with a search for an attorney, careful consideration should be given to the interview process.

Here are some questions that may be useful in determining interview guidelines:

- What will be your vetting process and who will be involved? Who will review attorney resumes and make initial determinations about who will be invited to interview?
- Who will be involved in the interview process: Just members of the current legal team? C-suite executives? Department heads and other “internal business clients” who rely on and interact with the legal team?
- Will there be one round of interviews or multiple visits to your company?
- Who will communicate with candidates?
- What will be the decision-making criteria? Will everyone work from the same criteria or will the process be more subjective, for example, based on whether the interviewer likes the candidate?
- What is the range of positions you handle?

These are key points to consider before engaging in the interview process. Often, the process starts before a plan is mapped out, causing a drag on the system. Once momentum has begun,

both parties want to keep the synergy, energy and process moving forward for a number of reasons:

- Focus helps create impetus with teams and during the decision-making and approval processes. You may not want to have to re-energize the team or restart the hiring process. Keep your team engaged by completing tasks, such as conducting interviews, giving feedback or making recommendations.
- When embarking on a search, you don't know who is in the market. You may catch individuals in the beginning, middle or end of their search, so you need to be nimble in response to the dynamics of the legal market. For example, if the ideal candidate is available early on but has other employment options, you may want to be ready and have the decision-making process primed and pumped. Otherwise, you may lose the candidate.

Continual communication is critical. Create communication channels and keep them flowing with relevant information.

Princeton Legal Search Group, LLC specializes in the placement of General Counsel level candidates and other exceptionally qualified attorneys with in-house legal departments across a variety of industries throughout the United States. Questions? Contact a member of our team: https://www.princetonlegal.com/team_category/staff/