

5 Ways for Law Firms to Improve Employee Retention



By **CHRISTINE PARIZO** - Contributor

As the economy continues to improve, law firms are increasingly competing for top talent. But attracting new associates is only part of the battle; while wining and dining the fresh law school graduates and enticing experienced attorneys from other firms can get people in the door, the firm's culture is what ultimately improves employee retention.



Updating office technology and fostering collaboration can help law firms improve employee retention.

Improving office culture goes beyond addressing how associates work with partners, paralegals, and other support staff. Talent retention extends to the office environment, the available resources, and the overall office atmosphere. Younger graduates may expect to find cloud technology in law firms to increase their productivity, as well as an office environment that fosters collaboration while still offering privacy. They also may expect to find perks beyond a coffee pot and a microwave. Here are five ways law firms can improve retention, boost morale, and increase productivity — and ultimately keep the firm's top talent.

1. Foster Collaboration

Collaboration spaces are critical for teams to hold informal meetings and strategize together. Consider how the office environment contributes to collaboration at your firm. Are there conference rooms that can be used for impromptu meetings? Are your associates'

offices located near their paralegals, or do they have to walk over to a cubicle farm to meet with them?

It may be time to re-evaluate how different departments are arranged throughout the office. For example, if the Medical Malpractice group is scattered throughout the office, and the Trusts and Estates departments are on different floors, it may be worth it to go through an office-wide move so that these departments are located in the same general area and associates from each can easily move between offices and cubicles.

In that vein, take an informal poll of the paralegals, especially if they are arranged mostly in cubicles. Younger paralegals may be interested in a more open office plan to make collaboration and communication faster and easier.

Finally, consider cloud technology for law firms, either basic office productivity suites or specialized software for reviewing documents, that will allow employees to collaborate online.



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2. Update the Office Space

When was the last time you updated the office appearance? If it was when your firm was founded, it might be time to redecorate and modernize. A fresh look can boost employee pride in the company and make for a more productive atmosphere. Observe the ways employees actually move around the office. If they have difficulty navigating through a maze of cubicles, for example, consider reconfiguring the cube arrangement to create an improved flow throughout the office. Little things like traffic flow can help retain employees.

3. Revisit In-Office Perks to Improve Employee Retention

A coffee maker is not enough to improve employee engagement. Firms don't necessarily need to install foosball tables and beanbag chairs in the office to help employees feel more comfortable, but they can create an office environment that employees want to use and that feels like a home away from home for them. As part of the office update, consider an employee lounge that includes comfortable couches, a Keurig coffee maker, water, and a space to interact during breaks.

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4. Provide Modern Ways to Work

A report for managing partners, Re-Envisioning the Law Firm, recommends considering alternative work schedules, a work from home policy, and work-life balance for associates. Generation X and Generation Y attorneys particularly value these options; a survey by Deloitte found that 16.8 percent of Generation Y and millennial employees prioritize work-life balance, and 11 percent of them are looking for the flexibility to work remotely if needed.

5. Have the Technology to Back It Up

Technology is key to creating an environment that improves employee retention, particularly with younger associates. The Re-Envisioning the Law Firm report advises that managing partners learn more about technology, as it will soon surpass rent as the number two expense after salaries. Although firms are increasing the most spending on cybersecurity, they must also ensure that their cloud solutions are meeting the needs of their employees. High-speed internet and voice and data services will ensure that employees can be productive in the office or when accessing systems remotely. That translates to more billable hours with less hassle and more satisfied employees.