

Finding Your Next “A” Team: What Attracts NextGen Lawyers to Your Firm?

By [LawVision](#) on February 24, 2015

As law firms continue to face maturing partnerships and impending baby-boomer retirements, many leaders are left wondering how best to position their firms for long-term strength and resilience. Although attracting NextGen lawyers continues to be a hotbed of conversation among our clients, few firms have actually developed an answer to the question: **“What makes our firm stand out to the talent we need to attract to be successful 10, 15 or 20 years from now?”**

It’s easy to throw resources at initiatives without understanding their ultimate impact. So what actually influences NextGen talent as they select their ideal law firm?

The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) recently collected insight from law school students across the country about what influences their decision-making in selecting law firms for summer associate positions. The results are insightful and instructive for law firm leadership:

Factors Influencing Decisions about Which Employers to Apply to for Summer Associate Positions:	
Factor	Percent of Respondents
Office Location	72.5%
Firm Culture	61.5%
Specific Practice Area Strengths	60.2%
Firm’s Reputation on Campus	29.7%
Training Opportunities	12.3%
Alumni at the Firm	10.8%
Firm’s Participation on Campus	9.3%
Firm’s Commitment to Diversity	8.0%
Firm’s Commitment to Pro Bono	8.2%
Other	6.2%

Factors Influencing Decisions about Which Offer to Accept:	
Factor	Percent of Respondents
People Met During Interviews	57.4%
Reputation or Prestige of Firm	52.1%
Specific Practice Area Strengths	39.0%
An Intangible Feeling	38.2%
Office Location	33.5%
Compensation/Benefits Package	16.4%
Callback or Sell Dinner/Event	9.3%
Firm’s Commitment to Diversity	8.0%
Firm’s Commitment to Pro Bono	8.2%
Other	6.2%

So what does this mean for law firm leaders? First, some of the “traditional” methods of reaching new talent aren’t as

impactful as originally perceived. Customary dinners, events, alumni headcount and participation at law school receptions do not carry as much weight as intangible factors like firm culture, reputation, prestige and intangible feelings.

Given that culture and people are the two leading controllable factors influencing NextGen talent, law firms are in an outstanding position to distinguish themselves from competitors. How to do it? First, make sure that the message of the culture is consistent and supported. This includes every level of the firm, from leadership to recent hires. Second, develop and incentivize external community roles and create opportunities for intergenerational education. Finally, create professional development and advancement opportunities that align the firm's external strategy with internal cultural objectives.

Defining a law firm's culture can be tricky. When I ask lawyers to tell me about their firm's culture I often hear the familiar refrains of "hard working", "no jerks", "collegial" or "sophisticated work". Given that these are nearly universal answers, they aren't true differentiators.

What *truly* makes your firm different from your competitors? How can the people who represent your firm to potential new hires become strong ambassadors of that culture? What is your firm's reputation in the market, and how does it align with your strategic objectives? Answering these questions is an important first step in attracting the "A" team lawyers you'll need to position your firm for long-term success.