

# LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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## Marketplace Realities Continue to Transform the Legal Workplace

A popular advertising catchphrase coined in the 1980s can be co-opted by the legal profession today: “It’s certainly not your father’s or mother’s legal workplace anymore.”



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Most legal administrators would agree that the legal profession has undergone a pivotal transformation during recent years, with changes evident in client requirements and legal workforce expectations, in the structure of legal organizations, in the skills and expertise required of legal professionals.

While a number of factors have impacted the legal field in recent years, client demands are one of the most significant drivers of change. Research conducted for Robert Half Legal’s annual Future Law Office project ([futurelawoffice.com](http://futurelawoffice.com)) indicates the business of law is more competitive than ever and clients have more access to legal services and more choices. Clients are seeking more value for their legal counsel; they’re requiring legal advisers who understand their business, industry and issues that could impact their organizations; they’re looking for business partners who can help achieve their business objectives.

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### LEGAL FIRMS MODIFY STRATEGIES TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE

In response to marketplace pressures, many firms are modifying their business strategies in a number of areas — from organizational structure and physical office arrangements, to staffing and retention, client relationships and alternative fee arrangements. Here are some examples:

- **Relaxing hierarchical boundaries:** With a central focus on client relationships, the traditional, hierarchical law office model no longer makes sense. Level-consciousness within the law office is giving way to the pragmatic assignment of tasks to employees whose skill sets are best matched to the work at hand, those who can most effectively and efficiently perform the duties while providing exceptional client service.
- **Changing the definition of client service:** Increasingly, law firms are employing client-facing teams to better serve clients. Typically comprised of partners, associates, paralegals and other

support personnel, these teams often take a cross-departmental approach, including experts from more than one practice area, depending on the topic or industry-focus.

- **Expanding duties for legal support staff:** Many firms are restructuring legal support teams to both lower costs and strengthen support levels. For example, legal staff members today are performing high-value functions once executed by professional and managerial staff, including conducting research, drafting legal documents and participating on client service teams. With legal support staff performing more substantive work, lawyers can focus on more complex casework, enabling firms to bill for certain services at lower rates. Many firms are also creating secretarial pools to support groups of lawyers more cost-effectively. And the hybrid or blended paralegal/legal secretary position is increasing in popularity, further enabling law firms to more effectively utilize support staff.
- **Adding non-associate positions to the mix:** Law firms also are modifying structural models for associates to offer clients lower billing rates. Some firms are introducing non-partnership track positions, such as career associates and practice group attorneys. These attorneys typically perform associate-level legal duties with reduced billable hour expectations and without staff management or business development responsibilities. While the salaries for these jobs are significantly lower than compensation for partner-track associates, the positions are attractive to many lawyers seeking a better work-life balance.
- **Growing demand for specialized expertise:** As clients seek legal counsel in specialized practice areas, such as litigation, commercial law, healthcare and compliance, competition for legal professionals with the requisite targeted skills and knowledge is increasing. More than half (57 percent) of lawyers polled by Robert Half Legal said it is somewhat or very challenging to locate skilled legal professionals today. To attract top candidates, law firms need to offer highly competitive compensation packages and often non-salary incentives, such as flexible work schedules and meaningful career development opportunities.
- **Increasing use of flexible staffing models:** To bridge the talent gap in many specialty areas, firms are engaging outside experts on a temporary or project basis to expand access to targeted expertise and help control costs. Flexible staffing strategies are particularly valuable for managing complex eDiscovery matters, which demand highly specialized skills.

While the legal profession has undergone a notable transformation during recent years, change will continue as new market pressures evolve. Successful firms will rely on legal professionals who continuously monitor the dynamic business landscape, employ strategies that reflect changing legal realities and embrace innovative ways to provide legal counsel and services that clients want and need.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles A. Volkert is Executive Director of [\*Robert Half Legal\*](#) based in Menlo Park, California. He is a former litigation attorney and has more than 15 years of experience in legal, e-discovery and strategic business management. A noted author and speaker on employment trends and career management strategies, he also specializes in legal search.

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