

## Six Questions to Ask About Professional Development When Considering Outsourcing

By Corinne Clark

Law firms are drilling down on staffing models. For this reason, expenses are expected to increase at a slower pace than revenue in 2015 as firms bring laser focus to staffing metrics, efficiencies, reducing excess capacity and making their staffing model as productive as possible. It is also a primary driver as to why outsourcing office services and administrative tasks are becoming increasingly a mainstream practice for law firms.



Choosing the right provider, however, goes beyond comparing prices and services and begins with a question: What has the outsourcing provider invested in its human resources? The quality of the outsourced staff is critical to a successful match and driving the law firm's anticipated results, but it requires upfront and proactive investment. It's essential for your firm to assess any potential outsourcing provider's staff professional development program.

A provider who invests in staff professional development builds motivated teams who show a higher level of skillset loyalty to the firm and increased job satisfaction — all resulting in higher staff retention rates and quality of services. In turn, it delivers direct benefits to the firm including gaining long-term, committed resources that provide optimal business continuity.

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## HOW CAN LAW FIRMS ASSESS THE QUALITY OF A POTENTIAL OUTSOURCER'S STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM? ASK THESE SIX ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS BEFORE MAKING A DECISION TO SELECT AN OUTSOURCING PROVIDER:

### 1. Is it managed by an in-house training organization with professional learning experts who design, deliver and track the effectiveness of training programs?

Custom-designed courses are more effective than off-the-shelf training programs. Established processes ensure immediate application of new skills and long-term reinforcement of those skills through coaching and follow-on training.

### 2. Has it been developed in collaboration with law firm management?

This step ensures that the program will help your firm meet its objectives. If required, the potential outsourcer can develop custom training unique to your law firm's practice, such as with legal terminology and specific areas of law operations.

### 3. Is it built on a proven multi-faced development strategy?

The best learning results are achieved using a 70-20-10 professional development model: 70 percent of training attained on the job, 20 percent through coaching and mentoring, and 10 percent via formal classroom or online training. The curriculum should reflect the critical competencies required for providing exceptional client value. Progressive skills-development tracks should include courses in operational effectiveness, client-facing skills and teamwork as well as human-resources topics.

### 4. Is it capable of multiple delivery options and flexible scheduling?

With the capability of offering several different delivery options including in-class sessions, webinars, on-the-spot cross-training and self-paced modules, training will not interfere with operations. Proper coverage is maintained at all times.

### 5. Is it consistently deployed?

The training organization deploys skills, knowledge, processes, messaging, techniques and structure in a systematic manner across all firm's locations. The objective is to ensure the firm's entire team receives consistent training and performs with a high level of professionalism.

### 6. Does it deliver measurable results?

Comprehensive tracking and reporting capability ensures that each associate across a firm's organization completes required training. It notes and tracks all activities including cross-training, job shadowing, online learning, coaching and classroom deliveries. Managers can quickly determine training progress and results for the team.

As you weigh the merits of various outsourcing providers, consider the level of investment each makes in staff professional development. An organization committed to continuous learning will provide firms with knowledgeable, well-trained, highly motivated and engaged staff ready to contribute. This is a critical differentiator.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Corinne Clark is the National Learning & Development Manager at Merrill Corporation. Her team oversees the professional development program for Merrill's managed services division to provide highest quality of staff to its clients.

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