

The Branding Blind Spot: **What Legal Recruiting Leaders Should Know About Candidate Experience**

By Scott Love

Branding in law firms isn't just about the logo, website, or firm name. It's about how your firm is perceived in every interaction, from client development to internal project execution. But one area where branding can be neglected and where reputational damage can quietly accumulate is in partner or associate recruiting.

The recruiting process speaks volumes about your culture, leadership, and professionalism. And in a competitive lateral market, poor recruiting interactions can irreparably harm your firm's brand with exactly the people you hope to attract.

Over the past few decades as a legal recruiter, I've received unfiltered, candid feedback from both partner-level and associate-level candidates who met with firms and walked away unimpressed — not because of the firm's

prestige or practice capabilities, but because of the execution of the recruiting process. Law firm recruiting professionals work hard to control the process and make it successful, but some things referenced here could require additional attention. Below are some of the most common issues that create a negative impression:

- **Leaders Show Up Late — or Don't Show at All**
When firm leaders miss or arrive late to meetings, it signals disorganization and disinterest. Even if the candidate ultimately joins, they carry that memory with them.
- **Lack of Preparation**
Candidates often report that firm leaders clearly haven't reviewed their materials or understood the business

case. This lack of engagement can come across as disrespectful or disingenuous.

- **Minimal Interest in the Candidate's Goals**

Too often, firm representatives dominate the conversation by pitching the firm instead of asking thoughtful questions and listening. This makes the candidate feel like a number, not a future colleague.

- **Incorrect Assumptions about Intent**

Many lateral candidates are not actively on the market. They're simply open to a conversation. Assuming they are shopping for a new home can create awkward dynamics that hinder rapport.

- **LPQs with Errors or Redundancies**

The Lateral Partner Questionnaire — or

similar documentation for associates and counsel candidates — reflects your firm's professionalism. A poorly formatted or outdated form sends a message that you haven't taken the time to think through your own process. Try

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asking your own partners to fill it out, you may be surprised at their reactions. Better yet, consider having each member of the hiring committee completely fill out the form themselves; it's often the most effective way to identify areas for improvement. You might also

benefit from hiring a graphic designer to enhance the layout and presentation. Finally, make sure the embedded form fields like text boxes and yes/no checkboxes actually function properly across different platforms.

- **Poor Communication in Rejection**

The way a firm says “no” matters. Failing to close the loop — or worse, ghosting the candidate — can permanently sour their opinion of your firm. And in a close-knit legal community, those stories spread fast.

- **No Follow-up After Submission**

When firms receive materials and then fall silent, it signals a lack of respect for the candidate's time and effort. Even a simple “we're reviewing and will get back to you” helps manage expectations and build trust.

The solution? Encourage your firm's leadership to treat your partner or associate recruiting process with the same attention and care as the client pitch process. That means refining the internal workflow, aligning messaging

across the firm, and yes — training partners on how to interview effectively.

Ask yourself: When was the last time your firm offered training on how to interview prospective lateral lawyers? When did you last audit the experience a candidate has from first contact through final decision? If the answer is “never” or “not recently,” then now is the time.

Every interaction a candidate has with your firm either builds or erodes your brand. Each conversation is a chance to reinforce your culture, demonstrate professionalism, and position your firm as the best place for top talent to grow.

In the war for talent, your brand isn't just about marketing. It's about execution. And recruiting is where your brand either comes to life — or falls flat. +



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