How Law Firms Can Improve Results from their LPQ

I once had a partner candidate who decided to stay with his firm after he had to fill out yet another LPQ. I will never forget hearing the exasperation in his voice after he spent several weekends working on the tortuous task of completing these complex documents. "I'm not filling out another (expletive removed) LPQ. Compared to the thought of filling out another form, my problems don't seem all that bad over here."

Do the initials L. P. Q. in your firm stand for Long Painful Questionnaire? If so, here are some ways to turn that dreaded document into a useful tool that yields multiple benefits beyond the diligence phase.

As an exercise, tell your firm's hiring partner that you would like to improve your firm's LPQ. "Splendid idea!" is the response you might receive. Then tell him or her that the first step is to require that all partners on the hiring committee take your current LPQ and fill it out over the weekend, the same way you request prospective laterals to do it. If this request is met with silence, anger, or laughter, then you know you have something that needs to be fixed. If they will not complete it, then at least ask them to review it line by line together, looking for ways to make it friendly.

Here are handful of ideas for improvement:

1. Remember that this document is not just a diligence document, but it is also a marketing document. For each prospective partner who fills it out and joins your firm, there are probably several others who do not join your firm for various reasons. Those who do not advance beyond the LPQ phase will forever remember your firm (and speak about it) based on their emotions associated with this document. And in the world of marketing, negative opinions are louder and faster than positive ones.

2. Proofread the LPQ for typos and grammatical errors. Run it through a spell checker.

3. Another reason I suggest the hiring partners of your firm fill it out is because they will catch what I have seen are embarrassing formatting errors. Over the years I have seen a few. Sometimes the formatting does not allow the numbers to fit. Or if you have a "check yes" or "check no" box, the boxes do not work and the candidate has to type in "yes" just to the right of the box, which is awkward and weird. Sadly, errors like this make your world class firm look like a junior varsity enterprise.

4. Offer flexibility in your document, such as allowing a candidate to add an excel spreadsheet for requested data. Some firms may say that their conflicts team requires data to be brought to them in a specific format. Then if that is the case, set up an excel document as a part of your LPQ that is formatted correctly in the way your conflicts team requires it and make that a required addendum to your LPQ, and not an awkward spreadsheet within the main body of it. Forget about trying to make columns fit on the exact same document that is a derivation of Microsoft Word. Use excel (since everyone knows how to use it and it always works) but make

it part of the process and have it already formatted properly so you can obtain the data as you require it.

5. Are you asking the same question multiple times in your document?

6. If you have received clarifying questions from candidates, or recruiters representing candidates, about certain phrases that are on your LPQ, then make sure you address those with your committee. If the question is ambiguous and needs verbal explaining, then you need to fix that.

7. Consider adjusting your LPQ process so that you save time and get an edge over other firms. Here is what I mean. Why are most people disqualified from advancing in your firm after the LPQ phase? It's probably related to conflicts and / or the book of portable business. If that is the case, then get that information and only that information first as a separate step in the process to quickly determine if they are a fit or not. If these are the two reasons why they would most likely be qualified or not, then why do you need everything else at that point? Rule them out or rule them in on these two variables first. And then if they are ruled in, get all the other detailed information. Assume that you have a very long form requiring a lot of detail that will require two weekends to complete. Compare it to a short form that will take an hour. Which one will be given to you before the other? Start with those questions which will quickly qualify or disqualify a candidate, such as the top five to ten clients, and a short explanation of the book of business that will port over including past three years collections. If the reasons as to why people are usually disqualified by your firm are either conflicts or the book, then get that information and only that information first to see if they advance beyond that phase. This concept in fact can be a very good reason as to why your firm may be a more attractive option than other firms, especially if a candidate is looking at having to fill out more than three of these maddening yet necessary documents with other firms.

8. There are advantages and disadvantages of having an LPQ online and not on a separate form. Can it be filled out on an iPad instead of a laptop? Further, if your LPQ is online, then you need to make sure that there is no chance of data being lost. Make sure your IT department sets it up to auto-save every few minutes. I have had this happen at least three times with three different firms which had online LPQ's. The candidate completed a significant amount of the document, and the browser crashed, and all data was lost.

9. Hire a graphic designer to polish up your LPQ. Put some nice formatting style into it, and definitely some color. I can't believe how many LPQ's I've seen from firms that do not even have the firm's logo on the document. At least do that. Perhaps add your firm's core values in a side margin space, and maybe add a testimonial or two from a recent lateral in some empty space as well. Remember that recruiting is sales.

10. Why is this LPQ important? This is an obvious question, but you need to articulate this to your prospective laterals, even if they have filled out these documents before. This is a simple task and may be overlooked as an obvious point. I have seen some firms use this step as a way to add differentiation and distinction. "What is different about our firm is that we take this document and this is what we do with it, and this is how it will benefit you." Every firm may do the same thing, but those which articulate this to the candidate are seen to have more clarity with their integration process, which is incredibly attractive to risk-averse partners who are

thinking of joining your firm. Anything that you can do which says "we are a safe bet with your career" is valuable. Use the LPQ to once again show them why you are a safe bet as a firm.

Once you improve your LPQ, then you need to reach out to those third -party recruiters in your network and let them know of your improvements. You may even get a burst of new submissions from them because of this exercise. It is not uncommon for recruiters to steer candidates away from firms that have really difficult and challenging LPQ's. (It happens. A lot.). If you make these changes then you can relax with confidence knowing that more candidates will happily agree to quickly complete your document in the hopes of joining your firm.

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