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Q&A

The Business Journal's Jane Yu asked local law firms whether the pace of associate hires has picked up in recent years after a long slowdown hiring in the industry following the recession.

Yu also asked attorneys how they're grooming young talent for their firms' future leadership.

Here are edited excerpts of their responses:

Dan Callahan

Managing Partner
Callahan & Blaine
Santa Ana

At Callahan & Blaine, the hiring of associates has significantly increased since the economic downturn. In fact, our firm has grown from 20 attorneys in 2008 to 35 attorneys in 2014. There are several reasons for this:

First, one of the pillars of our firm is that all of our attorneys have at least nine years of experience, and many have more than 20 years. Moreover, we hire attorneys from large law firms and then train them to be Callahan & Blaine trial lawyers and litigators. The result is a tremendous synergy of experience and efficiency for our business clients. We have a saying for this paradigm: 'twice the results at half the cost.'

In addition, as the economic downturn has caused corporations to reduce their legal spending, more and more businesses have turned to Callahan & Blaine rather than the mega-firms for their litigation needs. Further, as general counsel discuss among themselves the successful results we have obtained, the positive word of mouth and good will are spread wider. Hence, Callahan & Blaine has grown significantly during the last six years with high-quality and experienced lawyers.

With respect to the future leadership of the firm, even though it was established in 1984 and just celebrated its 30th anniversary, the large majority of our lawyers—24 attorneys—are under 50. Thus, we have an extremely strong nucleus for the future leadership and continued growth of the firm.

Moreover, many of our senior attorneys with 15 to 20 years of experience are given strong leadership and supervisory roles in complex business litigation matters, including trial experience. For example, partner **Marc Miles**, who is 42 and has 16 years of experience, has conducted numerous complex business litigation trials and arbitrations in recent years, including a

four-week trial in Central California where he was lead trial counsel and obtained a defense verdict in a \$114 million class action.

The partners at Callahan & Blaine are also very active in mentoring our attorneys and preparing them for future leadership roles at the firm, including encouraging our attorneys to be involved in leadership positions with the Orange County Bar Association. For example, **Kristy Schlesinger**, a 12-year attorney, just finished a very successful tenure as chair of the OCBA Business Litigation Section, the third firm attorney who has held that prestigious position.

John Cannon

Chair of Litigation Department
Stradling Yocca Carlson & Rauth
Newport Beach

We approach associate hiring and training in the same way we provide service to our clients: We are not constrained by a one-size-fits-all approach. Market changes provide opportunities for the firm to develop creative ways to train new lawyers and recruit lateral talent while maintaining our tradition of hiring exceptional recent law school graduates as associates.

For instance, the firm recently aligned with the University of California-Irvine School of Law to create the Stradling-UCI Law Fellowship. Through this program, two 2014 UCI Law graduates and recently added California Bar members were appointed to one-year "fellowships in practice" at Stradling's Newport Beach offices. The Stradling-UCI fellows are integrated within the firm's litigation department and receive on-the-job training in e-discovery, document review and analysis, and legal research and drafting. They participate in all departmental training and continuing legal education, and receive observation and mentoring opportunities. The Stradling-UCI fellows supplement the firm's incoming class of 2014 associates.



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The firm also has recently recruited laterals with specialized skill sets and experience. We staff matters to provide our clients with the highest quality and most efficient service available to create optimal value. We provide associates with hands-on experience, early responsibility, and the opportunity to develop real expertise and industry knowledge.

The Stradling-UCI Law Fellowship and the firm's approach to lateral hiring and associate development demonstrate Stradling's commitment to training new lawyers to meet client needs and the demands of an ever-changing market. Our model not only attracts the most entrepreneurial and talented associates, it prepares them to be the leaders of the next generation.

Wayne Gross

Partner
Greenberg Gross LLP
Costa Mesa

Associate hires have picked up somewhat since the downturn, but the market is still less than ideal for new lawyers. The reality is that law firms since the downturn have been under increasing pressure from companies not to use new lawyers on their cases because of perceived inefficiencies. Such outside pressure from

clients creates a disincentive to hire new lawyers. I understand this mentality, but what I tell clients is that new lawyers, when utilized effectively, can be a tremendous bargain. Their billing rates are obviously much lower than more senior lawyers, and with appropriate guidance, they can perform important work in a very cost-effective manner.

Accordingly, we do hire new associates but spend considerable time training them to help them quickly acquire those skills necessary to perform work consistent with our high standards.

I learned the importance of providing such training from my former position as head of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Orange County, where I was responsible for training new prosecutors. I observed remarkable progress in numerous new prosecutors from the quality training that they received in government service. The difference in now having my own firm is that new lawyers here, unlike at the U.S. attorney's office, receive top-of-the-market compensation based on the compensation scale established by **Crauth Swaine & Moore LLP**. My firm does this not only to attract the best legal talent in the marketplace, but also to encourage associates to work extremely hard for our clients.

In the end, however, the most effective way to groom young lawyers for future leadership is to instill in them the same sense of mission that many prosecutors possess. Lawyers, particularly those who aspire to leadership, should view each case as an opportunity to strive for excellence in the pursuit of justice. When lawyers are mission-driven rather than profit-driven, they understand that every pleading, every letter and indeed everything they do as lawyers impacts the quest for justice and therefore must be the finest work that they can bring to bear.

It is for this reason that our firm's lobby, like the lobby of the U.S. Attorney's office, features an American flag, serving as a constant reminder to all who walk through the doors that pursuing justice is the mission of the firm. Those associates that understand this mission will naturally evolve into leaders of not just our law firm, but of the entire legal community.

Greg Michelson

OC Administrative Partner
Haynes and Boone LLP
Costa Mesa

Haynes and Boone LLP has continued to recruit steadily through the years but has definitely experienced an increase in new associate hires since the depths of the recent U.S. economic downturn. Specifically, for the Orange County office, which is one of 12 firm offices, we have more than tripled the number of professionals since the office opened in 2009 by continuing to recruit the best legal talent.

We are confident that the extra effort we put into grooming our young talent sets us apart from our competition. From our summer associate program to our various associate training programs, established peer and mentoring programs, and various leadership roles and firm committees, we are committed to ongoing learning and development. Our commitment is rooted in our partners' recognition that the development, retention, and promotion of our attorneys

will determine the future success of our firm.

From the beginning, our incoming class of new lawyers participate in an orientation, onboarding, and training program that focus on providing our first-years the essential information they need to excel as new attorneys. The training program includes faculty from a cross-section of partners and associates from various practices and offices. Each associate is also assigned a partner and an associate mentor in their practice group to oversee the associate's development through the years as an attorney at the firm. Together, both the partner-supervisor and the associate-mentor offer the new associate a team to rely on for assistance with the successful integration into the firm, as well as the broader legal community.

As associates advance in their careers, the firm provides a multiday associate seminar where our midlevel associates learn information that is relevant to their career and provides an opportunity to stay connected with their peers across the firm. Associates are also provided with continual in-house professional development programs to pursue professional skill building in areas such as public speaking, deposition and trial skills, deal negotiating, and business development. In addition, the firm also provides various leadership opportunities to associates in various committees and firm organizations to help them grow professionally within the firm and, as part of the above-mentioned training programs, become its future leaders.

Tom Newmeyer

Administrative Partner
Newmeyer & Dillion LLP
Newport Beach

At Newmeyer & Dillion LLP, associate hires have picked up since the downturn, and we continue to grow. We have been able to extend offers to all associates who have participated in our summer program and made lateral hires, as well. We have been extremely impressed with the quality of available candidates.

With respect to grooming our young lawyers for the future, we have taken significant steps to provide additional guidance and training. Each associate is provided with a mentor, and we have increased in-house training sessions to expose our young lawyers in advance to the types of matters they will be working on. We have an open-door policy with respect to our partners and encourage associates to ask for input whenever they have questions. We also encourage them to get involved with bar activities so that they can become more active members of the legal community. We believe in giving back to the community and have an established pro bono program wherein we offer our attorneys full credit in billable hours for 50 hours of pro bono work. Our training, however, does not stop with new attorneys. Each lawyer who is approaching partnership is allowed to participate in the Orange County District Attorney's Trial Attorney Partnership program to increase his or her trial skills.

We have a firm culture which promotes "like, trust and respect," not only among our lawyers but our entire staff.

It has been extremely successful, in that we have very little turnover at all levels. We are very optimistic about the future due in large part to the fact that the quality of our younger associates matches that of our more seasoned lawyers. Most important, however, is our dedication and loyalty to our clients, without whom we obviously could not succeed and to whom we are extremely grateful. **Greg Dillion** and I believe that

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dedication to our clients and open communication among associates and partners lead to new ideas, practice areas and overall growth of the firm. Staying flexible to new ideas enhances adaptability to an ever-changing legal market and helps ensure overall stability and growth.

Steve Nichols

Managing Partner
Rutan & Tucker LLP
Costa Mesa

Rutan has hired lateral associates for almost all of its practice areas since the downturn, particularly for our corporate and real estate transactional practice groups. In addition, when larger law firms were canceling or reducing their summer associate programs during the recession, we decided strategically to grow our summer associate program to attract the best talent coming out of the nation's top law schools. This resulted in particularly strong recruiting classes during the economic recovery. We are now benefiting from having many strong midlevel associates



that we hired and/or developed during the economic slowdown and early stages of the recovery.

We have historically considered the summer associate program to be our primary source of new lawyers and new partners, and many of our partners have worked their entire careers at Rutan. If you walk the halls at Rutan, you find that many of our attorneys started at Rutan as summer associates or first-year lawyers. In fact, this past summer we celebrated the 50th anniversary at Rutan for **John Hurlbut**, one of Rutan's senior litigation partners.

Rutan is grooming its future firm leadership by providing attorneys with early responsibility to build their legal experience, expertise, leadership and management skills; investing in training and mentorship; and encouraging young attorneys to be involved in firm committees, business development activities, and charitable and civic organizations.

Junior attorneys at Rutan are encouraged to assume significant responsibility for the formation and implementation of transactions and early case strategy and management. In addition to providing more hands-on experience at an earlier stage in their careers, Rutan continually trains and mentors its attorneys with practice group meetings and educational programs to ensure that our attorneys are equipped with practical legal skills at an earlier stage than many of their peers. Rutan has also established a formal

mentorship program whereby each junior attorney is paired with a senior partner and a peer mentor. The peer mentor may counsel his or her mentee on day-to-day work issues, but the goal for the senior mentor is to develop into a sponsor who will advocate for his or her mentee and provide opportunities for career advancement.

Rutan also encourages and actively supports participation in a variety of programs and activities that promote future firm and business leadership for young attorneys. Junior attorneys are provided with regular training on client management and business development skills, and they are encouraged to get out of the office and become active in industry groups and their local communities. Rutan's commitment to such opportunities has allowed us to place many of our junior associates and partners on prominent local charitable boards and civic organizations.

As a result, our young attorneys assume leadership roles at relatively early stages. They become involved in decision making in outside organizations and through their participation on firm committees. Rutan recently established an associates committee comprised of associates and partners to involve associates in firm decisions and to ensure that the firm effectively addresses issues impacting growth opportunities for our junior attorneys. We are proud to be adding several partners this year, many of whom started with the firm as summer associates and all of whom have benefited from Rutan's active mentoring and attorney development programs.

John Simonis

Office Chair
Paul Hastings LLP
Costa Mesa

Entry-level hiring in our Orange County office has been relatively stable since the economic downturn, with a moderate increase in 2014. Our lateral hiring needs in the Orange County office have increased in the past two

years, and we expect this trend to continue.

Attracting and developing top talent is a fundamental strategy for our firm. We select associates who fit our culture: collaborative, entrepreneurial and innovative. Our associates have a clearly defined career roadmap, and we empower them to own their career development.

We begin investing in the development of our associates before they officially join the firm, while they are summer associates. For example, we have a workshop on presentation and networking skills for our summer associates. Our PH DNA (Developing New Associates) program is the firm's comprehensive learning and development experience for our first-year associates. This yearlong program accelerates our associates' preparedness to deliver excellent client service by focusing on the business of our clients, emphasizing practical, hands-on learning experiences, utilizing coaching to elicit strong performance, and increasing their knowledge about the firm's strategy and business goals.

We have a coaching program in which junior associates are paired with midlevel or senior associates who coach and mentor them in a variety of ways, including encouraging them to develop their leadership skills and master their junior associate competencies. We also have junior associates serving on many of our office committees, encouraging them to take leadership roles early in their careers.

Our Mid-Level Associate Symposium is an intensive learning experience for fourth-year associates to begin mastering breakaway independence, advancing their leadership skills, and concentrating on specialization in their practice. Among other symposium experiences, associ-



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ates focus on developing client relationship skills and creating their own business development plans.

Our senior associate program is an in-depth learning and development opportunity aimed at developing a partner mindset. The associates demonstrate leadership skills through collaboration and building effective client service teams.

Michael Tenerelli

Southern California Office Head
Dorsey & Whitney LLP
Costa Mesa

Since the downturn and due to increased work and the need to plan for the future, the hiring of younger associates has picked up. This also allows us to offer a creative rate structure that meets the experience needed for certain clients and matters where full partner attention is not required. However, we continue to be selective when choosing to make offers to ensure it is in the best needs of the firm.

With respect to how Dorsey is grooming the young talent for future leadership, I think it is important that a strong leader have actual hands-on experience. In this regard, there is an emphasis on getting the associates actually involved in a matter at an early stage. In the case of litigation, this means the associate will not only prepare for depositions but will take the deposition, and not only prepare a motion but will argue the motion. Early introduction to the client is also extremely important. The associate must know the client, not just from reading material, but actually speaking with the client and participating

with them in discussions about strategy, issues, and strong and weak points of any given case.

In addition to legal work, it is important that the associate participate in community, as well as local bar activities. Dorsey encourages the associates to join a community organization, to attend bar events, and get to know the judges, their peers and community leaders. Associates are guided to learn not only the practice of law but also the business side of the practice of law. It is important for associates to interact with not only those within their practice group, but also other colleagues in other practice groups, both on the associate and partner level. Because together, we all make one firm, and leadership must lead the entire firm, not just some smaller groups within it.

Paul Wallin

Managing Partner
Wallin & Klarich
Tustin

The number of lawyers working at Wallin & Klarich has fluctuated from 12 to 16 over the last few years. We pride ourselves on hiring promising young lawyers who have drive and an absolute passion for criminal defense.

When searching for a new associate, we look for new lawyers who demonstrated initiative during their time in law school. Many of our associates interned for public defenders or district attorneys' offices while in school. This is an indication that they have a true interest in criminal law and would be a strong asset to the WK family.

Our new lawyers are extensively trained so

that they feel confident upon taking their own caseload. We first have them learn how to properly speak to a client or a client's family when they are being accused of a crime. We also ensure that our young lawyers understand how stressful this time is for our clients. Since opening our doors in 1981, the driving force behind our law firm's success has been the fact that we work around the clock for our clients and provide them with the confidence and knowledge that we always have their best interest at heart.

We also pair our new lawyers with our experienced criminal lawyers in court and guide them through the entire criminal process. This allows our young lawyers to gain an understanding of what they will be facing when they go to court for the first time and represent a client of Wallin & Klarich.

Our newest partner, **Matthew Wallin**, is a prime example of how an untried associate can progressively develop into a skilled criminal defense attorney. Matthew began his journey at WK eight years ago as a law clerk when he was trained from day one to practice criminal defense the "right way." His tenacious drive and unmatched dedication demonstrated that he had the necessary qualities to become a partner.

It is our goal to train all of our new associates like Matt and to help them become leaders at our firm and of the criminal bar. Our aim is to continue to thrive and to maintain the reputation that we have developed for more than 30 years as a law firm that truly cares about its clients.

Leigh Ann White

OC Office Managing Partner
Carothers DiSante & Freudenberger LLP
Irvine

At Carothers DiSante & Freudenberger LLP—a statewide, 40-attorney labor, employment, and immigration law boutique firm—we have seen a steady increase in associate hiring since the economic downturn.

With the increase in associates comes the need

to train and groom the younger talent for future law firm leadership. Succession planning is key for any law firm to focus on to ensure they remain competitive in today's legal landscape. A key component of that is to keep actively cultivating leaders to hand over the day-to-day management responsibilities of a firm.

At CDF, mentorship plays a key role in grooming younger lawyers. Diversity and gender equality also play a large part in our mentorship program. While we do not have a formal, systematic approach to mentorship, typically our mentors are partners whose careers are at points where they can take the time to help the more junior attorneys achieve their professional goals. We have fostered a culture in which all of our attorneys, regardless of what level they are, make it a point to mentor those attorneys that are more junior than them.

While our mentorship is strong, we also have a good balance of offering new leaders the independence and autonomy to be creative in their positions and to find the balance they need to be successful. They get the support from the firm's executive committee that they need in order to excel in their position. In addition to giving them the autonomy necessary to be an effective leader, they are also given billable hour credit for law firm leadership hours spent.

"Our firm was founded on the principle of mentoring our junior attorneys to become the leaders of the future, and we have done just that over the last 20 years," said **Marie DiSante**, firm managing partner. "When our attorneys develop as leaders within our firm, everybody wins—our firm, our clients, and our associates." ■



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