

# Leveraging CONTRACT ATTORNEYS

HOW TO MAXIMIZE  
FLEXIBILITY AND PROFITABILITY.

WRITTEN BY RUBY L. POWERS

**LEVERAGING CONTRACT ATTORNEYS, ESPECIALLY DURING LABOR SHORTAGE, AND TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY,** is an increasingly popular solution for law firms. Contract attorneys are lawyers who provide their services on a short-term or project basis. During the past few years, this has been an essential component for firms to increase efficiency and profitability.

A main advantage of hiring contract attorneys is flexibility. Firms can hire contract attorneys to handle a surge in caseload or to assist on a particular matter. This approach allows firms to adjust their staffing levels as needed, without committing to long-term employment obligations.

Attorneys often find themselves double booked for a hearing, an interview, a deposition, etc., and so they need additional coverage. I realized I couldn't cover all my hearings and interviews, but I also was having a hard time finding qualified, experienced attorneys to work for my team full time. When you have attorney backups for your needs, it allows you to practice with less stress, ensure your clients are covered, and focus on the best use of your time. My solution was to build a team of contract attorneys with various expertise and availability to be ready to go when needed.

Contract attorneys can offer specialized expertise in areas that can help either expand your firm's practice area reach or supplement your existing areas. This can help your team learn new areas and/or help provide synergistic areas to your clients. The cost-effectiveness of contract attorneys increases profitability. Most contract

attorneys are typically paid on an hourly or project basis. This allows firms that do not have the resources to hire full-time staff to hire only for the work needed. The firm can stay nimble and hire help on-demand.

I have found it best to have a few contract attorneys pre-vetted with agreements signed, fees listed, and terms. To start, evaluate your firm's stated needs, then post for the contract positions. Most contractors I have now were found via word of mouth, as former employees, or referrals from other attorneys. Whether there is a peak period of business or tight deadlines that can't be met by the firm, having this preliminary work done in advance will allow you to best know if you can handle the work, your fees, and estimated timelines.

Firms should create clear guidelines and protocols for conducting conflict checks, sharing confidential information, and using secure communication and collaboration tools to ensure that sensitive data is protected. Agreements should include fees, terms of engagement, and an expiration date. Conditions for the relationship should be evaluated on a regular basis.

It is important to properly integrate contractors into the firm's workflow and culture. Contract attorneys don't have the same level of investment in the firm's success as full-time employees, and they may not be as familiar with the firm's policies and procedures. To mitigate this challenge, firms need to establish clear expectations for communication and collaboration and provide training and support to ensure that they are

equipped to handle the tasks assigned to them. Additionally, try to incorporate them in your firm's group events and important meetings to help build a collaborative culture and informed team members.

I started building my team of contract attorneys out of necessity. Knowing I have them available keeps my mind at ease and helps our firm continue to consistently meet clients' needs without disruption. Contract attorneys can be a valuable asset for law firms of all sizes. They offer flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and specialized expertise that can help firms increase their efficiency and profitability. By using contract attorneys strategically, law firms can position themselves for success in today's competitive legal market. **TBJ**



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