

Core Competencies for Legal Recruiters

By Wisnik Career Enterprises, Inc.

February 2013

The legal industry has become increasingly competitive over the last few years. Law firms have been forced to market themselves to attract business and legal hot-spot cities like New York, Chicago and DC have seen Summer Associate classes decrease by as much as half. So where does that leave law firm recruitment professionals?

Law firms' heightened competition, for both talent and business, means recruiters are now expected to go above and beyond straight recruiting. To make sure their firm gets a leg up on the competition and the law students they hire are the best of the best, law firm recruiters need to take up a more strategic role. To help our friends in the law firm recruiting field navigate these changing waters and captain their own professional development, Wisnik Career Enterprises, Inc. (WCE) has developed a Core Competency Model for Law Firm Recruitment Professionals.

WCE's Core Competency Model for Recruitment Professionals highlights four critical areas: **Organization and Planning, Communication, Relationship Building, and Professionalism**. While these areas have been broadly accepted as pillars of the field, the expectations that department directors and firm leaders have of their recruiters has changed. Through research and analysis of the legal recruiting industry, WCE extracted the specific skills and behaviors needed to be a valued asset to your firm at each level from Assistant to

Director. Presented below are the highlights of this Competency Model and suggestions for how you can think about the firm's "big picture" and act strategically throughout these four critical components of legal recruiting.

Organization and Planning appear to be skills that are easy to develop and, in fact, most recruiters are fairly adept at prioritizing and scheduling. The key piece that separates adequate legal recruiters from strategic thinkers is planning in an



708 third avenue, 14th floor • new york, ny 10017 • t: 212.370.1010 • f: 212.949.9449

www.wisnik.com • ewisnik@wisnik.com

© Copyright 2013 Wisnik Career Enterprises, Inc.

What you say to firm leadership about your recruiting results or needs could be 100% true and yet still not make an impact.

adaptable manner – being able to re-plan. Recruitment plans are far too people-dependent to be set in stone and, as any law firm recruiter knows, changing schedules and project demands interfere with even the best laid plans. To overcome this, recruiters should have contingency plans in place, which requires you to anticipate potential problems while keeping the end goal in mind. Every recruiting action you and your department take should aim at contributing to a larger firm goal. If you consider this while planning, then the exact path you take can change without affecting your ability to get the job done. Your plans should also take the rest of the firm's needs and abilities into account. Recruiters cannot operate in a bubble – the economy, the firm's resources

and a variety of other constraints need to play into your thinking. Strategic organization and planning means planning for results and effects *beyond* recruitment.

Since recruiters are a critical link between the firm and the external legal world, **Communication** skills are of the utmost importance. Yet there are ways in which even the demands on communication are changing. Anyone can talk, but a much smaller number of people successfully deliver a message. As your attorneys would likely tell you, the act of persuasion is often in the delivery. What you say to firm leadership about your recruiting results or needs could be 100% true and yet still not make an impact. Knowing how your message will be best understood by your audience

allows you to tailor it to them, conveying what they need to know in the most effective way. What you say is more impactful if your listener walks away understanding how you are helping them achieve their goals. You can accomplish this by clearly articulating how your recruiting endeavors fit into the firm's big picture and affect bottom line results. When recruiters are performing their job strategically, what they are saying and doing is *vital* to the achievement of firm goals.

As with communication, the ability to build relationships with attorneys, schools and students is a necessary trait of a successful legal recruiter.

Relationship Building is about much more than simply having contacts and a sizable network. Consider that recruiters are building relationships for the greater purpose of building the firm. If that is the goal, then concentrating your efforts on the firm's "target" schools is a more powerful

growth opportunity than forming associations elsewhere. Further, building relationships between your firm and the legal talent pool requires you to be a faithful and meaningful representative. The more you know about your firm and its goals, and the more you embody its culture, the more

likely you will be to attract candidates who are a good long-term fit for your firm – saving time and money and increasing overall profitability.

The fourth and final competency area,

Professionalism, goes far beyond a business-like image and the ability to maintain confidentiality. True professionalism involves continually seeking out ways to improve both yourself and your firm. It is about your attitude and the way others feel about relying on you. When the recruiting director considers who to promote, she is not choosing someone with merely a professional demeanor, she is

Recruiting is not only about bringing new people into the firm – it is about growing the firm from inside and out and steering every inch of that growth toward the larger mission.

promoting the person she trusts the most to do the job. There are many ways to inspire confidence in those you work for and with. The fact that you are reading this article on professional development is a good sign. Demonstrating a desire to constantly improve – both your work and the quality of the firm – will engender faith and confidence in those around you. Consistent good judgment is a quality we all strive for, and something recruiters can achieve by considering their firm's strategic goals when making recruitment decisions. Taking into account the needs, constraints and goals of areas outside of recruiting will better position you as a trusted strategic thinker for the firm as a whole.

To truly excel in the high demand world of strategic legal recruitment, recruiters need to own their personal professional development. By learning to bring your department and specialized abilities in line with the long-term success of your firm, you can become an indispensable asset. Do not let yourself become siloed in your

recruitment chair. Recruiting is not only about bringing new people into the firm – it is about growing the firm from inside and out and steering every inch of that growth toward the larger mission.

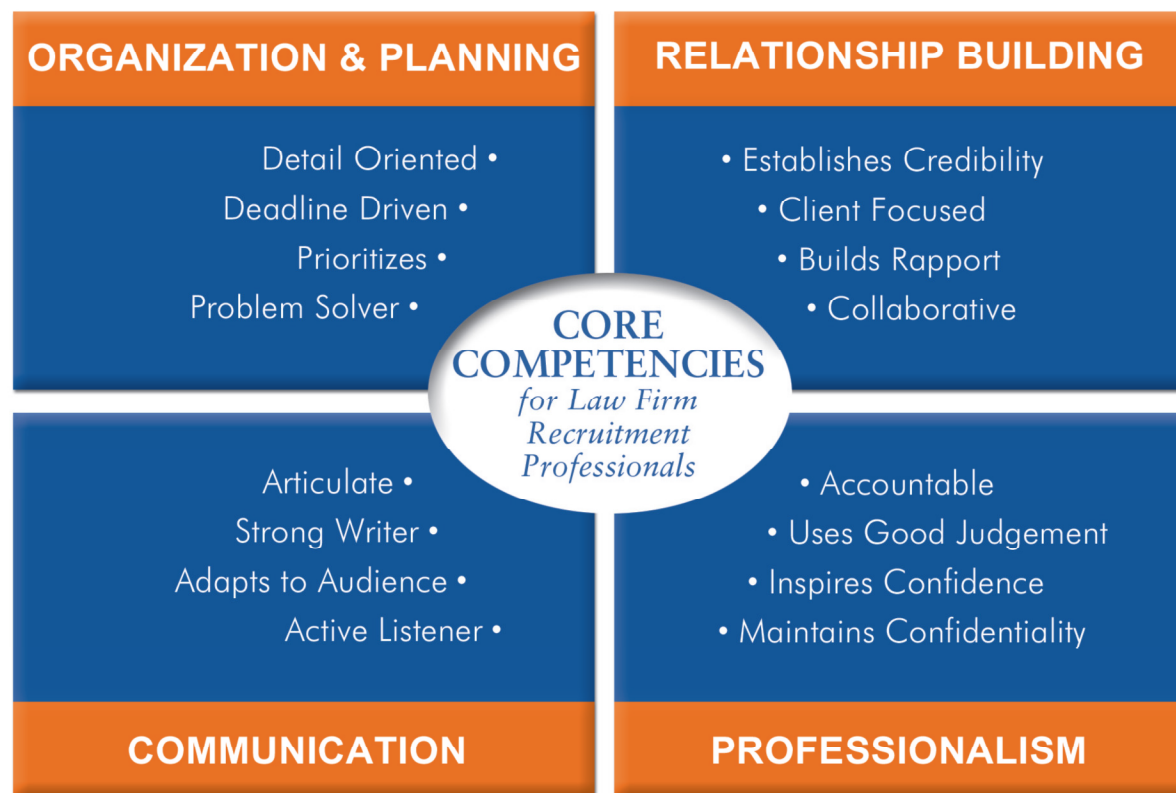
Shifting to a big picture focus and building your capabilities in the areas of organization and planning, communication, relationship building and professionalism can help you become even more strategically-minded and valuable to your firm. It is our hope that the key skills highlighted by our Core Competency Model can help you evaluate your current skillset and develop goals to expand on it. A visual summary of the four critical competency areas and their main components is presented below.

As always, it is our goal to help you achieve your goals and we look forward to using this Competency Model with you to develop new ways to do so.



Our goal is to help
you achieve your

goals



Wisnik Core Competencies

www.wisnik.com