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Should I Spend Money on a Business Development Coach?

In this new column, three shareholders with Chamberlain Hrdlicka answer questions about your partnership goals and what to do once you get there. For this time, a partner seeks book-of-business help and another looks to move on.

By **Philip Karter, Jennifer Karpchuk and Kevin Sweeney** | August 11, 2020



L-R: Philip Karter, Jennifer Weidler Karpchuk, and Kevin Sweeney of Chamberlain, Hrdlicka, White, Williams & Aughtry.

Advice for the New Partner

In this new column, three shareholders with Chamberlain, Hrdlicka, White, Williams & Aughtry answer questions about your partnership goals and what to do once you get there.

Q: I made partner a few years ago and now the pressure to increase my book of business is greater than ever. One of the senior partners suggested recently that I would benefit from seeing a business development coach on a regular basis. This expense would come out of my own pocket, and it seems like something that

would be more helpful to an associate—not a partner like me. Is it worth it?

I don't have to tell you, firms are not very patient these days with partners who don't meet expectations. The legal landscape is filled with once-promising lawyers who fell off the fast track because they couldn't keep up with business development. A coach won't make you a better lawyer, but he will help you sell yourself to clients, which is something we weren't taught in law school.

Business coaches come in many flavors, and here's what to look for: A coach should offer an assessment of where you stand, what you could do better, what you're not seeing about yourself. Second, the two of you together should come up with goals—objective, measurable goals, probably attached to dollar signs. Third, together devise a plan to get there, which will include discipline, tactics and strategy. Fourth, expect the coach to hold you accountable to your commitments and to deliver hard truths if you aren't following the plan.

Don't get hung up on needing coaching—most successful people had help along the way. Bryce Harper has a hitting coach and Carson Wentz has a quarterback coach. That's how they keep their jobs and maybe it's how you will keep yours.

Q: A firm I respect has asked me if I would be interested in joining them. I'm in a good place with my current firm but the suitor is a bigger firm and they are dangling the possibility of earning considerably more in the long term. Any advice?

Start with an assessment of the bigger firm's culture. Law firms tend to overuse the word "culture," but firms really are different in how they treat people. A lot depends on you. Maybe you would be comfortable in a firm where Darwinism is the operating philosophy and the behind-the-scenes maneuvering would make a good script for "Suits." If collegiality is more your thing, pay attention to what you hear. A firm known as a pool of sharks probably earned such a reputation. What is the turnover? Firms that are good places to work hold on to people more than other firms. What are the optics? Are there younger people making a contribution and building careers? Does the firm have people who look like you? Is the firm supportive of pro bono? You're going to spend thousands of hours with your colleagues and you'll be happier if you look forward to going to work and seeing them each morning.

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