

Should I Start a Junior Associate's Committee at My Law Firm?

Question: *I am a junior associate in a mid-sized firm. For a variety of reasons, we are suffering an exodus of junior associates. Some juniors do not believe that the firm offers them a future.*

Despite this, I am one of the true believers in this firm. I'd like to start a junior associates' committee so that we may address different issues facing us, and possibly solve them. Any guidelines that you may provide?

Answer: I like your positive and take-charge attitude! A junior associates' committee is a wonderful idea and something that should be promoted in every law firm. But I wonder why you would want to limit it to only the junior associates; I'd think there's much the firm can learn from having midlevel and senior associates in the group.

First, however, I would like to know why so many junior associates are leaving in droves and yet you - and obviously others - believe that the firm offers a solid future. Are you sure that you are not just witnessing normal attrition? In the middle or near the end of their second year of practice is the time that many associates look to leave for what they think are greener pastures. Has there been a specific event that triggered this exodus? If not, what appears to you to be an "exodus" may actually be normal attrition. Recently I was asked to sit on a panel at the first session of a law firm's associates' roundtable. It was a wonderful experience for me, and provides a roadmap for how these kinds of committees can be organized. The chair of the committee asked some of the more experienced associates to sit on the panel to help lead the session. Questions were distributed to panel members, in case it took a little bit of prodding to get the group going. All of the associates in the office were invited to meet in a large conference room from 6 p.m. to approximately 7:15 p.m. The key to this first meeting was the enticement to get the associates to attend: pizza and beer! Simple but brilliant! At 6 p.m., who isn't ready to get up from their desk for a pizza and beer break?

The effort had the blessing of the managing partner, but no partners were invited, so that associates could feel free to bring up any topics of concern to them. The issues discussed were gritty and timely, and the conversation was open and honest. What was most striking to me was how much the senior associates cared about their more junior colleagues. They were more than happy to share their experiences and to make suggestions about how to succeed in the firm and the profession.

If you could organize such a committee at your firm, it might somewhat stem this tide of defections or, at the very least, provide those involved with an understanding of what is causing the associates to leave the firm. With this knowledge in hand, you could share the information with some of the partners, who could work toward improving everyone's professional lives.

You seem to be the logical choice to start the ball rolling since you feel strongly - and positively - about the firm's future. Try to seek out some midlevel and senior associates who are like-minded, and begin to form the foundation of the associates' group. Send an e-mail to all of the associates announcing the formation of the committee and asking for any interested parties to volunteer to help organize the first meeting. By the way, make sure you first get the blessing of the firm's managing partner before undertaking any of this.

Once you have set up the agenda of the first meeting, make sure that you establish a regular meeting schedule. The most common mistake made by fledgling organizations is not following through with a meeting schedule. Don't fall into the trap of postponing meetings because something else comes up. Get the members of the group in the habit of knowing that on a certain date each week or month or whatever, there will be a meeting of this committee. Also, make sure that you appoint one or two associates to act as the liaison between the committee and the partners.

You have come up with a great idea and I hope that you carry it out. I think the partners will be very happy to see that there are associates who are committed to the future of the firm. All of this helps to make for a happier and healthier work environment. Please do let us know how this all works out. Best of luck!

Summary: *I'd like to start a [junior associates' committee](#) so that we may address different issues facing us, and possibly solve them. Do you think this is a good idea?*

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