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## COVER STORY



Juliane Backmann / Special to the Daily Journal

When he came on board with Norton Rose Fullbright as a partner last year, John Yslas first got the chance to meet with the firm's attorneys from around the world as part of an effort to cultivate a sense of one another's strengths.

## Life in the Big Leagues

By Steven Crighton / Daily Journal Staff Writer

For partners moving laterally to a firm that employs thousands of attorneys worldwide, getting settled requires a little more effort than a walk around the office and a company-wide introductory email. That's why many of the world's largest firms, including Dentons and Norton Rose Fulbright, now have fully fleshed out integration processes to help new hires acclimate as quickly as possible while preventing any hiccups in service to clients.

"We're not just taking them to lunch on the first day and showing them where the washrooms are. We're helping that individual come to the firm, establish the connections they need to make and meet the key individuals they need to meet," said Jay Connolly, Dentons chief talent officer. "We get them to know the things they don't know they don't know."

For an increasing number of the world's largest firms, bringing in lateral partners with established books of business has become the norm, eschewing the traditional

associate-to-partner career arc.

Legal recruiter Lyndon Parker said that "the most successful firms" are the ones with strong integration processes in place.

"It's like a marriage. You want to go through the dating process to get to know the other person," Parker said.

For most firms, Parker said, the process starts with something as simple as an introduction.

John Yslas, a partner at Norton Rose Fulbright who joined the firm's Los Angeles office in April of 2014 from Foley & Lardner LLP,

said the first step was a retreat to help familiarize partners new and old from around the world with each others' practice strengths.

"It ended up being a mix of learning things about each others' practices and getting exposure to industry groups in a social setting that facilitates getting to know each other," Yslas said.

Norton Rose Fulbright's Chief of People and Development Susan Manch said new partners are then introduced to many of the firm's departments, using as an example the marketing team, who help transfer clients and maximize a global platform.

Dentons' integration process is similar, according to the company's U.S. legal recruitment director Suzanne Kane, with new partners meeting with leaders throughout the firm and working with marketing teams to communicate the move to their clients.

Taking it a step further, new partners at Dentons are also paired with "integration partners" — partners who have been with the firm for a long time who can answer questions big and small and communicate any problems the new partner is having, Kane said.

John W. Martin, partner-in-charge of Baker Botts LLP's Palo Alto office, said that their integration process has partners heading on what's essentially a "roadshow from office to office."

"They'll meet with practice leaders and firm management to make sure the firms know they have a new lawyer on board and what their practice is and how they can help that lawyer adjust," Martin said.

The need for such integration processes is in large part due to lateral hires underestimating the difficulty in moving, Manch said, both logistically and mentally.

"Many partners have been with their firms for a very long time, and there's an emotional piece to sepa-

rating from a partnership they've been a part of often since they were an associate," Manch said.

The move can be difficult for the new partner's clients, as well, especially as the biggest firms can be hotbeds for conflicts of interest.

"They're anxious and want to make sure everything goes smoothly, make sure the technology and billing approach is the same, that the caliber of associates is the same," Manch said.

Edwin Reeser, a Pasadena attorney and former managing partner at Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal LLP, said that conflicts of interest, along with clashing personalities are two of an integrator's biggest concerns.

Cooperative personalities help a large firm flourish more than competitive ones, Reeser said.

Yslas said the emphasis on cooperation was evident from his initial meeting with Norton Rose Fulbright.

"It's a team-oriented, supportive environment where we're always working towards a common goal," Yslas said.

Reeser said the cooperative emphasis is easy to understand when you consider global law firms as not just one giant megafirm, but a conglomerate of smaller firms working in unison.

"A lot of times, the size of the platform is not that critical in the work that you get. Even these big vereins are doing local work," Reeser said. "It's kind of like a franchise."

Kane said that's because big firms like Dentons are striving to be "truly polycentric," which means that there is no headquarters and no dominant culture.

"If you speak to any of our offices, you're not stepping into one mega office with 100,000 lawyers. You're stepping into a firm that understands the market, and has professionals working in that jurisdiction," Connolly said.