



How to Boost Business — and Employee Morale — by Partnering with Your Law Firm

Employment and Labor



CHEAT SHEET

- **Investment.** Implementing a mentorship program between a corporation and a law firm does not require significant monetary investment, rather a considerable time investment.
- **Diversify activities.** After identifying and understanding the needs and profiles of participants, create activities that include trainings, CLEs, social events, and facility and firm visits.
- **Benefits.** A successful mentorship program can result in closer understanding and connection between the company and law firm. Thus, leading to greater value, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- **Continue improving.** Accountability, communication, and openness are essential to improving upon the program. Regularly gather feedback from program participants on how to keep things interesting and beneficial.

The relationship between corporate legal departments and law firms is rapidly evolving. C-suites expect their corporate legal departments to do more with less and act as “trusted advisors.” In turn, corporate legal departments expect their outside lawyers to provide data-driven, business-integrated

solutions rather than just prepare memos, close transactions, and handle cases. And corporate legal departments prefer to work with a smaller number of firms than they have in the past. A growing number of law firms are consolidating in order to operate profitably in an ever-increasing competitive environment. Being a good in-house lawyer is no longer enough — law departments need to work with dynamic outside firms to deliver results. So, how can legal departments identify a trusted advisor?

Both corporate legal departments and their outside law firms also face an increasingly common challenge of recruiting and developing talented attorneys. To recruit and develop key talent, corporate legal departments and law firms must provide their attorneys — especially younger attorneys — with rich professional experiences and opportunities that stretch them. A work environment where attorneys only come to work, handle legal matters, and go home does not create job fulfillment or foster long-term development. Instead, most attorneys want a work environment and office culture that fosters their professional and personal growth, is innovative, and offers meaningful opportunities for social interaction.

With these two challenges in mind, Flex Ltd. and its outside law firm Dykema Gossett created an innovative mentorship program to benefit the business and their attorneys. The mentorship program created numerous business and other opportunities for Flex and Dykema. This article shows how implementing a mentorship program with a law firm can build the trust that is necessary to propel business.

Trusted advisor

Flex is a Fortune Global 500 technology manufacturing company. Flex's approximately 200,000 employees around the world design, engineer, and provide manufacturing solutions for customers at more than 100 sites in 30 different countries, with its United States operations concentrated in San Jose, CA, and Austin, TX. Dykema has worked with Flex in the United States for approximately eight years. Initially, Flex viewed Dykema as a litigation and appellate subject-matter expert and then as a problem solver and valuable resource. Like most firms, Dykema worked over the years to become a trusted advisor to Flex. As a trusted advisor, Dykema's role would transition from an important source of information for Flex based on expertise to a haven for Flex on hard issues based on trust. The mentorship program was a major catalyst for the trusted advisor relationship. After all, establishing personal relationships is a prerequisite for trust.

Mentorship program

The Flex/Dykema mentorship program allows four of Flex's younger attorneys in Austin, TX, to personally interact and develop meaningful relationships with senior and junior Dykema lawyers through regular group events and personal interactions. The Flex attorneys are not rotated in and out of the program, and new attorneys can be added to the mentorship program over time.

Mentors and buddies

Under the mentorship program, senior Dykema attorneys serve as mentors to younger Flex attorneys, and junior Dykema attorneys become "buddies" to Flex attorneys. Mentors are seasoned Dykema attorneys that the Flex attorneys may contact regarding questions or concerns (legal and non-legal). The mentorship program benefits Flex by providing the Flex attorneys with access to senior practitioners who are not supervisors or coworkers. Likewise, buddies are junior Dykema attorneys who are contemporaries of Flex's younger attorneys. The Flex attorneys are in close

contact with their Dykema buddies to ask questions or share personal and professional experiences about, among other things, working in private practice and the technology manufacturing industry, respectively.

Dykema mentors and buddies practice in a variety of areas but generally focus their practice on areas of interest to the Flex attorneys. More importantly, Dykema and Flex selected the individual mentors and buddies because these individuals expressed genuine interest in (1) the Flex attorneys and their careers and interests; (2) helping the Flex attorneys grow personally and professionally; (3) Flex as a company and as a Dykema client; and (4) building long-term relationships with Flex and its attorneys.

Whether as mentors or buddies, the mentorship program helps develop personal relationships between the Flex and Dykema attorneys who participate in the mentorship program. This fosters trust and understanding between the two parties — a precursor to a successful business relationship.

Events

The mentorship program offers and combines social and professional experiences. Attorneys participating in the program meet and interact over meals, phone calls, emails, social events, continuing education courses, training, office visits, court appearances, and facility tours.

The mentorship program's first event was a CLE on transactional writing. Before the CLE, the mentors and buddies had an introductory lunch with the Flex lawyers. At lunch, they learned about one another and discussed what they hoped to achieve from the mentorship program. Approximately 20 people attended the introductory lunch and about 30 people attended the CLE.

Subsequent events included a tour of Flex's Austin facility, a reception and dinner, and phone conferences on legal topics. Future events include additional CLEs on, among other topics, negotiation, additional site visits, other social events, and a seminar and training session on networking skills. The program participants will follow the seminar and training session on networking skills with a reception at which participants in the networking seminar and training session can practice the networking skills learned at the seminar.

While the authors of this article manage the mentorship program and generally select the formal program events, the participants are encouraged to develop personal relationships with one another and to interact outside of official events. To that end, Flex and Dykema attorneys have had numerous "unofficial" meetings, social interactions, and site tours.

Goals and objectives

Flex and Dykema have both joint and individual goals and objectives for participating in the program. They both want it to:

- Foster and strengthen the relationship between Flex and Dykema;
- Create genuine bonds between their respective lawyers;
- Improve the value and delivery of Dykema's legal services for Flex;
- Elevate and cement Dykema's role as a trusted advisor to Flex; and
- Provide an enhanced work experience for their respective attorneys that improves morale and retention.

However, Flex has its own additional goals. It hopes the program will:

- Provide enhanced training for its young attorneys, especially those attorneys located in remote locations, in both hard (legal knowledge) and soft (interpersonal) skills;
- Expose its young attorneys, many of whom have not worked in a law firm, to law firms, the law firm environment, and law firm lawyers;
- Create deeper connections between Flex and Dykema, one of Flex's key legal providers;
- Help one of Flex's key legal providers learn more about Flex, which in turn allows it to more effectively and efficiently provide legal services to Flex;
- Provide access for Flex's young attorneys to specialist mentors and buddies at Dykema to help educate Flex's young attorneys in practice areas important to their work, but areas in which Flex has limited inhouse resources and expertise; and
- Create unique and innovative benefits to Flex's lawyers.

Likewise, Dykema hopes the program will also:

- Expose more Dykema attorneys to a key client and help Dykema's attorneys gain a deeper understanding of Flex and its business and strategic goals;
- Allow Dykema's junior attorneys to meaningfully engage, interact, and develop relationships with in-house lawyers from a key client — an objective stated by many of Dykema's young attorneys;
- Elevate and cement Dykema's role as a trusted advisor to Flex;
- Create a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate to Flex Dykema's expertise in practice areas that Flex had previously not worked with Dykema on, and for Flex to interact with lawyers that practice in these areas;
- Provide its younger attorneys with the opportunity to obtain firsthand knowledge of a key client's business by visiting its factories and production lines; and
- Create opportunities for Dykema's senior lawyers to mentor a key client's junior lawyers and to help these junior lawyers foster their careers.

Implementation

Implementing a mentorship program does not require a significant monetary investment. However, to succeed, a considerable amount of attorney and administrative time is needed.

The first task in implementing the program is identifying and understanding its participants. In doing so, Flex and Dykema asked the Flex attorneys about their goals and objectives for the program and learned about their practice areas and their backgrounds. Then, a pre-selected group of Dykema attorneys were matched with Flex lawyers according to personalities, objectives, and goals.

After selecting the Flex and Dykema attorneys, a calendar of training exercises, social events, CLEs, facility and firm visits, and other events was created.

Training and CLEs

As part of the program, Flex attorneys attend Dykema provided training programs and CLEs (also attended by Dykema lawyers) on matters of interest to Flex and the Flex lawyers, such as transactional writing, negotiation, and balancing between the role of trusted advisor and company guardian. Flex and Dykema combine these training programs and CLEs with social events such as

lunches and receptions.

Social

In addition to lunches and receptions that accompany the training events and CLEs, the lawyers attend purely social events that allow them to interact in non-work settings, learn more about one another, and build meaningful personal and professional relationships.

Flex/Dykema visits and workdays

Dykema attorneys toured Flex's Austin facility, and Flex's attorneys visited Dykema's Austin and San Antonio offices. In the future, several Flex attorneys plan to work onsite at Dykema, and several of Dykema's attorneys plan to work onsite at Flex. Many junior Dykema attorneys have never visited a client's facility, and many younger Flex attorneys have never visited a partner law firm's office. The Dykema attorneys were fascinated by the opportunity to leave their "ivory towers" to visit real mass production lines on the ground in the United States where Flex manufactures complex technology, such as telecommunications gear and networking equipment, including both large and small form factor printed circuit board assemblies (PCBA) and systems. This helped bring to life the gamut of legal issues Flex faces around the world, including commercial partnering with customers and suppliers, regulatory labor issues, and real estate matters. It also revealed the level of complexity that Flex must manage in the global supply chain. Several Dykema and Flex attorneys prize this aspect of the program the most.

Court hearings, strategy meetings, etc.

In order to enhance the professional experiences for the Flex and Dykema junior attorneys, the Flex and Dykema attorneys will have opportunities to work together on various matters, including preparing for and attending court hearings and participating in strategy meetings on Flex matters.

Benefits

The business benefits of Flex's and Dykema's participation in the program are undeniable.

From Flex's perspective, having Dykema engage more closely with Flex and its attorneys has created a closer understanding and connection. This has reduced many "cycles" in obtaining answers, solutions, and end products sought by Flex. Participating in the program has improved Dykema's ability to effectively resolve Flex's internal and external corporate, litigation, and compliance issues, and to answer Flex's internal questions. Moreover, Dykema has increased its value to and efficiency and effectiveness in working with Flex. For example, in light of Dykema's increased understanding of Flex, its culture, and its lawyers, Flex requested, and Dykema provided, a well-received CLE to Flex's entire global legal team on balancing between meeting an in-house lawyer's objective of being a trusted advisor to the business and their duties as company guardians.

From Dykema's perspective, the additional interaction with Flex and bonding created by the program provides Dykema with a stronger connection to Flex and has allowed Dykema to build a strategic, long-term relationship with Flex as opposed to one that is purely transactional. Dykema has benefited by receiving new work from Flex, by obtaining assignments in areas not previously handled by Dykema, and by increasing morale among those Dykema attorneys who participate in the mentorship program. Moreover, Dykema attorneys working for Flex are finding greater satisfaction in the work

they do for Flex.

The following quotes from participants in the mentorship program demonstrate the unique benefits and the positive views of those participating in it.

“Throughout the mentorship program, the Dykema team has continuously made the time and effort to get to know me, my practice area, and the complex Flex business models in an engaging and collaborative manner. I am beyond confident in Dykema’s ability to provide effective and accurate legal service because of their top tier legal knowledge, and, more importantly, their continued effort and willingness to understand the Flex business and the challenges I face as an in-house attorney. On a more human level, it was an absolute pleasure getting to know the Dykema team, and I feel very fortunate to have developed such a trusting relationship with a highly-skilled group.”

Tyler Sheridan, Legal Counsel

Flex

“This is such a unique program, and one I am confident will prove to be invaluable for both Dykema and Flex. Having spent a considerable part of my career in a large law firm and in-house, I learned the hard way how different the two roles are and the unique pressures and challenges faced by new — and even more seasoned — attorneys in these two environments. This program is allowing attorneys at Dykema and Flex to learn from one another’s unique experiences and perspectives. I am sure every attorney involved will be better for it. My only disappointment is that I didn’t have access to a program like this 20 years ago!”

Butch Hulse, Member and “Mentor”

Dykema

“This unique opportunity with Dykema will allow me to gain valuable exposure to law firm life. I’m excited to acquire knowledge on a particular subject or subset of law that I can further supplement in my current position and also pass along to my colleagues. This mentorship program is a chance to develop new skillsets and build relationships between Flex and Dykema.”

Anju Mohan, Legal Counsel

Flex

“The innovative mentoring program that we rolled out with Flex almost one year ago continues to provide amazing opportunities for our more junior lawyers to gain experience on the ‘shop floor’ with Flex, and to really learn Flex’s business while at the same time allowing Flex attorneys to develop their skills in different areas of practice. It’s a truly win-win partnership.”

Chris Kratovil, Member and “Mentor”

Dykema

“The Dykema-Flex mentorship program is a unique opportunity. The attorneys from each company gain insight into what the other is doing, each gaining valuable perspective. It fosters a collegial atmosphere that transcends the business relationship, and has the potential to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the in-house/outside counsel dynamic.”

Charles Hammond, Corporate Counsel
Flex

“This program is one of a kind. It brings together lawyers from different backgrounds and gives us the opportunity to share what works (and what does not work) in our respective practices. Having worked only in a law firm, I never truly understood the issues that in-house counsel face on a day-to-day basis. This program has allowed me to gain this insight, and now I can apply what I have learned to my own practice. In just two events, I’ve gained knowledge that will allow me to be a better lawyer and to provide better client service. That I get to know young, bright, and dynamic lawyers is just another plus to this program!”

Rea Fernandez, Associate and “Buddy”
Dykema

Challenges

Despite its success, the challenge for Flex and Dykema will be keeping the program fresh, innovative, and interesting for the participating attorneys. Many initiatives and great ideas decay over time. To prevent this from happening to the program, the authors of this article have made themselves personally responsible for the success of the mentorship program. It is not capital intensive. However, keeping it interesting and beneficial to those involved requires continual innovation and fresh ideas, material input, and action from those participating in the program, as well as accountability, communication, and an openness to ongoing discussions about what works — and what Flex and Dykema can improve about it.

Conclusion

To date, Flex and Dykema’s mentorship program has been a success for all involved. The development opportunities and job satisfaction of the Flex and Dykema lawyers participating in the program has increased. Flex and Dykema have received objective business benefits from it, including enhanced value of the Dykema relationship to Flex, and increased business and opportunities to Dykema from Flex. Furthermore, Flex and Dykema have enhanced and solidified Dykema’s role as a trusted advisor. Together they are committed to working to keep the program innovative, fresh, and beneficial to all involved. Considering the success of it, Flex is working on similar programs outside of the United States.

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Flex

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Powell leads the company's global ethics and compliance, litigation, labor and employment, legal operations, and government relations.

Before joining Flex in 2017, Powell was lead counsel of global M&A and investments at Lenovo. He also served as the general counsel for the company's cloud and software business, supporting compliance and data privacy. Before Lenovo, he served as vice president and assistant general counsel at Cricket Wireless.

Powell has deep law experience with global technology multinationals and emerging growth companies. He started his career with Baker & McKenzie in London.

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