

To Breed Leaders and Keep Clients Happy, Firms Go Back to School

By Susan Beck
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In April, Quarles & Brady sent 36 of its younger partners to the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University for four days of leadership and team building training. During the firm's annual partner retreat in Phoenix last month, several of the partners led sessions on the lessons they learned, including the importance of developing habits that foster not just success, but well-being.

Like other businesses, many law firms cut back on executive training programs after the recession of 2008, according to Ann Herring, Kellogg's senior director of executive education. But now they're returning, she said.

"In the last four to five years, there's been a huge resurgence because of pent-up demand," said Herring, who estimates that Kellogg has created programs for roughly a dozen law firms over the past decade. DLA Piper, for example, continues to send partners to Harvard Business School and Harvard Law School for leadership training, as it has for years.

"We have found it to be a critical part of our leadership, planning, collaboration and integration efforts," said Roger Meltzer, the firm's global co-chair.



Jeff Peelen



Adrienne Olson



Raye Daugherty

These days, Quarles & Brady and other firms are increasingly focused on training for younger partners, instead of sending a handful of their most senior lawyers, according to Herring. "Firms are providing leadership training much earlier in careers," she said.

"We're keenly focused on succession," said Quarles & Brady partner Jeff Peelen, who is a member of the firm's executive committee and helped organize the training at Kellogg. "The message [from the firm] is: This is not future leaders' training. The time is now to exercise your leadership ability."

The firm views the training as crucial as partners at Quarles & Brady cultivate long-term relationships with clients and each other, Peelen said. "Maybe we're not representing Fortune Five companies doing

cross-border M&A deals every day,” he explained. “Our sweet spot is building relationships where we can be a trusted outside adviser. You need people very good at collaborating.” (Quarles & Brady last year sat in 120th place on The Am Law 200, with revenue of \$258.5 million.)

The firm worked with Kellogg for nine months to customize sessions, which included programs called “The Heart of Advantage: Winning Clients through Culture” and “Leading With Vision and Purpose: What’s Your Story?” (The curriculum is available here.) Kellogg also offers more traditional financial courses, such as interpreting data, which Quarles & Brady didn’t include.

The cost of the four-day programs ranges from \$5,500 to \$7,500 per lawyer, which includes lodging and meals on campus, according to Kellogg’s Herring.

Peelen believes that this training can translate into results. Three years ago Quarles & Brady sent about 30 partners to a management program at the University of Notre Dame’s Mendoza College of Business. That program convinced the firm that it needed to be more rigorous about lateral hiring, including studying data on hires and better integrating partners. The changes it made led to measurable improvements, Peelen said. “In the three years following the Notre Dame program, we grew our Chicago office from 77 lawyers in 2013 to 110 in 2016,” he said.

Interest in the Kellogg program at Quarles & Brady was so high that the firm had to turn down more than half the lawyers who wanted to go, according to Peelen. Five executive staff members, including the CFO and head of human resources, also attended. But Peelen and other top leaders

opted out. “Top management made a conscious decision not to attend,” said Peelen. “We wanted attendees to participate as leaders in their own right, which they are.”

Two partners who attended, Raye Daugherty and Adrienne Olson, said that they’ve already applied principles they’ve learned, which ranged from specific negotiating techniques to networking strategies to advice that borders on the psychological. Former Baxter International Inc. CEO Harry Kraemer Jr. led a session entitled “Values-Based Leadership” in which he stressed the value of self-reflection. At the end of the day, instead of scribbling a to-do list for the next day, it’s important to stop and think about what you accomplished, he told them.

Daugherty, an intellectual property lawyer, said that she now asks herself at the end of the day: “How did you treat people today? If you had to do it differently, how would you?” Olson, a Milwaukee government affairs partner, agreed that the exercise was valuable. “The professional reflection helps to stop the wheels from turning at night,” she said.

Daugherty also said that she learned the value of planning for possible failure. “Even if you’re successful with a book of business, think about what happens if you fail,” said the Milwaukee partner. “What if you lose a client? How will you treat one another? How will you rebuild?”

She was a bit skeptical about the program before she attended, Daugherty said, but now raves about the experience. “It was the best conference I ever attended in my career,” she said. Olson added: “I came back re-energized to connect people in the firm and do more client development.”