



2023

LAW FIRM

CULTURE

SURVEY

CHARACTERISTICS THAT
DEFINE FIRM CULTURE

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 MAJOR, LINDSEY & AFRICA  LAW360® | Pulse 

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BACKGROUND

We are excited to share the results of our second Law Firm Culture Survey. The survey, conducted in conjunction with Law360 Pulse, was originally designed to provide a tangible understanding of what characteristics or traits most directly represent a law firm’s “culture,” to identify how lawyers rank the most prominent traits of their firm’s culture, and to determine how closely those traits match the lawyer’s own personal values.

As with the inaugural survey, this second edition was again answered almost 2 to 1 by senior lawyers, i.e., partners and leaders of legal departments. This reveals the importance of culture—how it defines a firm and aligns with lawyers’ personal values—to those with a vested interest in the enduring success of the firm along with the responsibility for shepherding it forward and delivering it into the care of the next generation. We are encouraged by the increased representation of women and lawyers of color among our respondents, and hope their representation continues to grow going forward.

INTRODUCTION

As recruiters, lawyers seeking to explore new opportunities frequently ask us about the culture of a given firm or company. Employers also want to know whether the reality of their culture is consistent with who they envision and present themselves to be. Yet, when we have tried to flesh out exactly what lawyers and law firms mean when they refer to “culture,” we have often heard terms and phrases like “collegial,” “collaborative,” “Midwest nice,” or “a great place to work,” even within this survey. These generic references connote a feeling or attribute but lack specifics about what particular characteristics or traits constitute “collegial” or “Midwest nice.”

To home in on the specifics of what constitutes a firm’s “culture,” the survey presented 28 traits and invited respondents to identify 10 that most define their firm’s culture. The full list of traits is available in Appendix 1. Certain results from the inaugural survey prompted clarification of several questions to obtain more definitive responses. These included questions about high-performance expectations, where quality of work is emphasized over hours billed; about whether firm culture has changed since respondents arrived, where substantially fewer respondents identified that trait this time around; and about diversity, which now appears more highly ranked than before.

In that regard, there remains a notable, even substantial, gender gap on several traits, with men expressing clear preference for traditional Mars-type traits whereas women lean decidedly toward more communal success and personal accommodation. Responses consistent with the prior survey were found with respect to the top four traits most lawyers and law firms value—namely, the continued disdain for emphasis on profitability, and the desire for more focus on developing talent for the long-term success of the firm, as through training and mentoring, more focus on wellness and work-life balance, and succession planning.

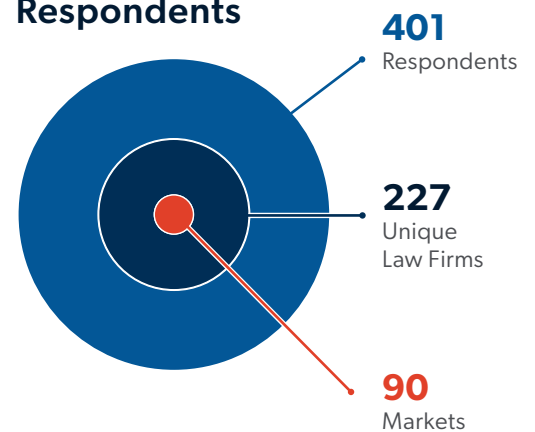
DEMOGRAPHICS

We received responses from lawyers at 227 unique firms, averaging 296 lawyers in size, in 90 markets.

Seventy-eight percent of respondents identify as White, not Hispanic. Six percent identify as Hispanic, 5% identify as Asian Pacific. No other group measured higher than 3%.

Fifty-eight percent of respondents identify as partners, 4% identify as managing directors and 2% identify as chairman, for a total 64% of respondents being senior members of their firms. Twenty-two percent identify as associates, while 13% identify as other.

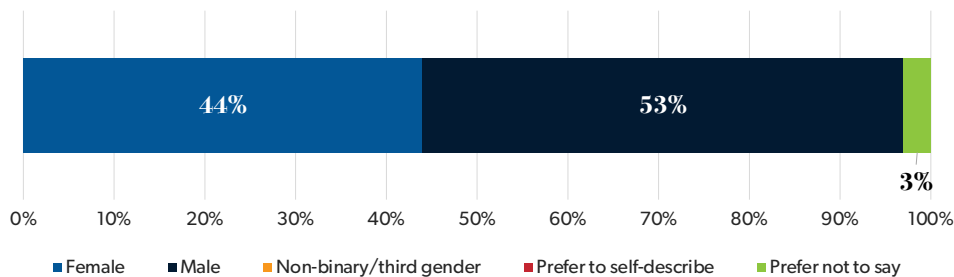
Respondents



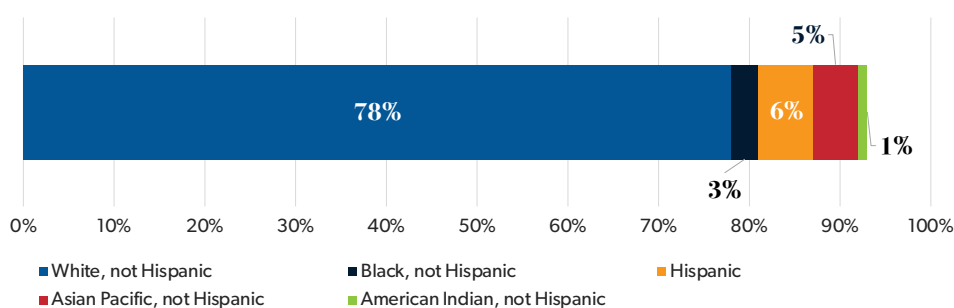
Title



Gender



Ethnicity



Male respondents decreased by 6%, the same percentage by which female respondents increased. Respondents were fairly divided over generational cohorts, with as many lawyers responding who entered practice in the 1980s and 1990s as lawyers from the 2000s and 2010s.

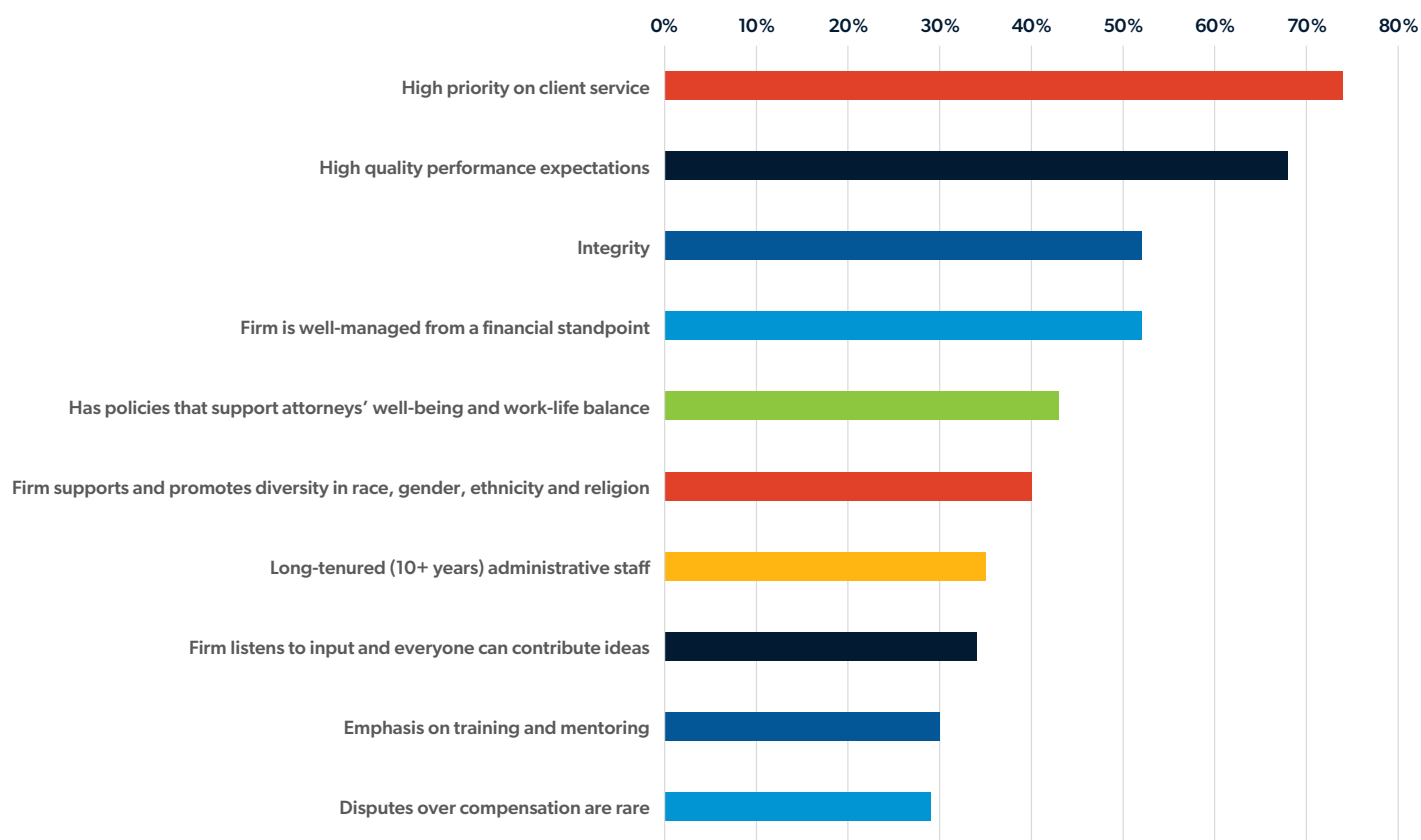
KEY FINDINGS

- We clarified several questions from the inaugural survey and received materially different responses on the value of three implicated traits: high-quality performance output, broad gender, ethnic and religious diversity and increased diversity in leadership positions. Support for the idea that lawyers/law firms should generate high-quality work product increased by 18 percentage points. Forty percent of respondents believe diversity is a trait their current firm values, ranking it sixth where it previously did not crack the top 10. Lastly, there was significant support in the prior survey for the proposition that women and lawyers of color should occupy positions of leadership (36%), a position respondents continue to support and that 29% would like to see even more of.
- Despite distinct generational and gender preferences and dislikes, the majority of respondents continue to rank the same four traits among the most highly valued by their firms. To wit: high priority on client service, high-quality work product, good financial management and integrity. Adherence to these traits should reassure anyone concerned about law firm culture declining in the era of celebrity/Instagram culture and the “Super Rich” law firm. Lawyers continue to hold themselves to a traditionally high standard that places the client’s interest above all. The biggest point swing in responses between this and the inaugural survey relates to whether law firm culture has changed since the respondent arrived. Eighty-two percent of inaugural survey respondents said their firm’s culture had noticeably or significantly changed. Only 48% of current respondents say so.
- Most respondents (65%) moved to their current firm from a prior firm, and 74% believe their current firm’s culture more closely aligns with their personal values.
- Wide variety exists in how Hispanic lawyers and Asian-Pacific lawyers view their respective firms’ commitment to various traits, and how men and women value initiatives that seek or promote broader inclusion, good health and wellness. Where Hispanic lawyers rank their firm above average—sometimes well above average—on commitment to certain traits, Asian-Pacific lawyers rank their firm below average on the same traits.¹
- What the current results reflect is a Hispanic legal community on one hand that believes in and feels seen and supported by their legal employers and, on the other hand, an Asian-Pacific legal community dubious about how inclusive and concerned certain law firms and legal employers truly are regarding their lawyers’ well-being, despite what those employers may say.
- Men appear to place lesser value on the elements of “soft power,” i.e., investment in civic involvement, diversity, work-life balance, having women and people of color in positions of leadership and pro bono and public service. In light of the demographic evolution occurring within the American population, this Mars-like preference for “hard power,” i.e., focus on output and profits, is at risk of being tempered by time.
- Though respondents do not regard law firm heritage and intellectual elitism as valued traits (though, interestingly, associates do at twice the rate of partners), they strongly favor high-quality performance output (68%), ranking it the second highest value of their firm with an 18-point increase and two-place elevation over its prior ranking.
- While transparency continues to be an issue at some law firms, most respondents are optimistic about their firm and believe it to be on the rise.

¹ The numbers of Hispanic and Asian-Pacific respondents are insufficient to draw broad conclusions about either group, but we find the indication of a group sentiment notable.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Identify the top 10 traits or phrases you believe best embody your firm’s culture:

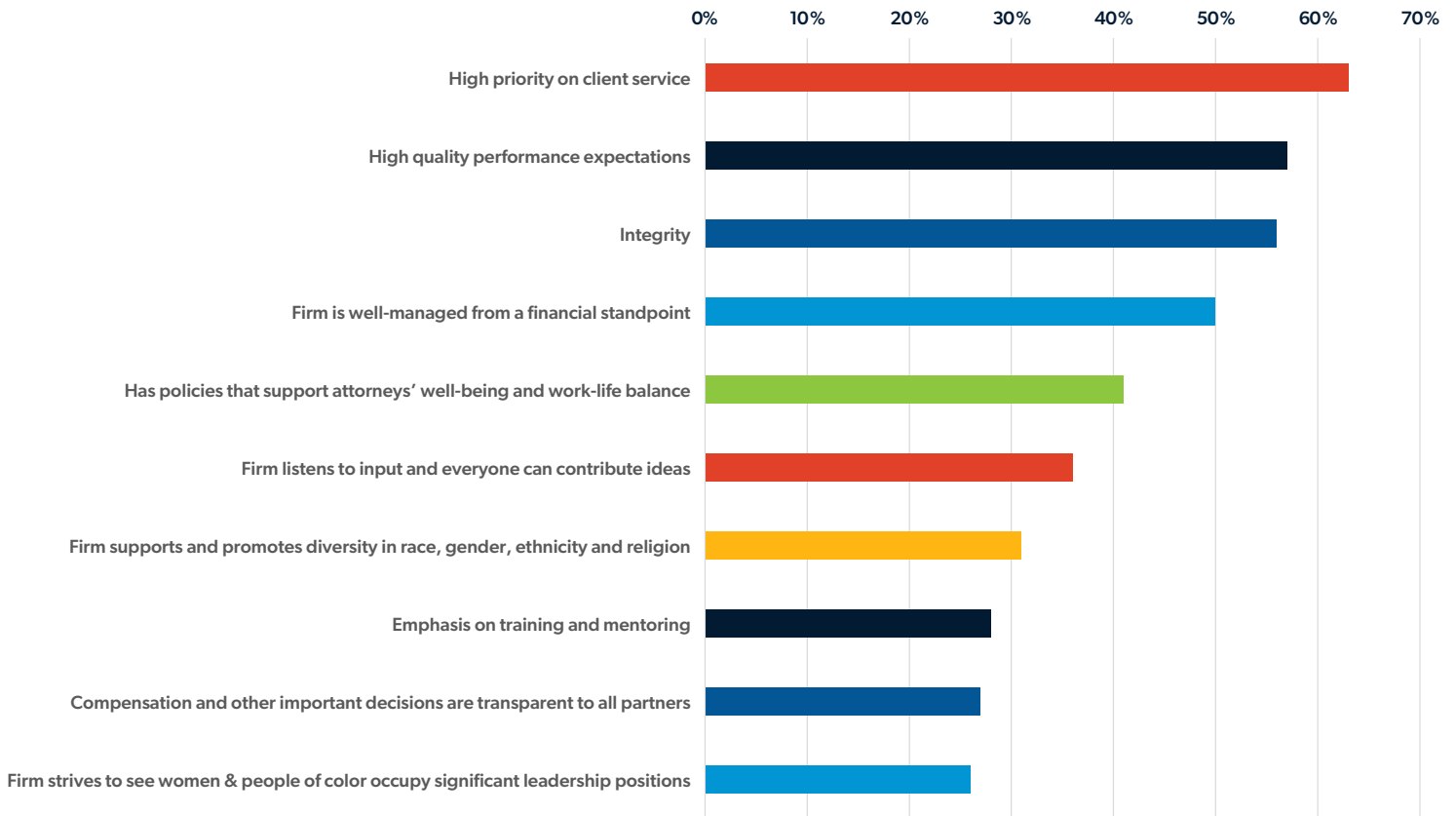


The top four ranked traits in this survey reflect lawyers’ traditional belief in, and holding themselves to, a high professional standard, one that places highest priority on client service supported by high-quality performance and integrity. This standard is shared by lawyers across the gender, ethnic and demographic spectra.

Adding the clarification that “high-quality performance expectations” relates to quality of output, rather than to hours billed led to a surge of responses that lifted this trait 18 percentage points over its prior ranking (from 50% to 68%), well above financial management and integrity (both at 52%). Support for broad diversity in race, gender, ethnicity and religion, which did not make the last top 10 list, ranks sixth in this year’s results of traits that best embody respondents’ law firms’ culture. The surge in this trait’s ranking suggests it may be more accurate to say that broad diversity is a supported end state, but not always a current state.

Women, who represented a greater percentage of respondents in this survey, ranked diversity 34% to 21% over men as a trait of their firm’s culture and ranked seeing women and people of color in leadership positions 40% to 16% over men—a whopping 26 percentage points!—which suggests women recognize and appreciate the value of diversity more than men do.

Which 10 traits inspire your most positive feelings about your firm?



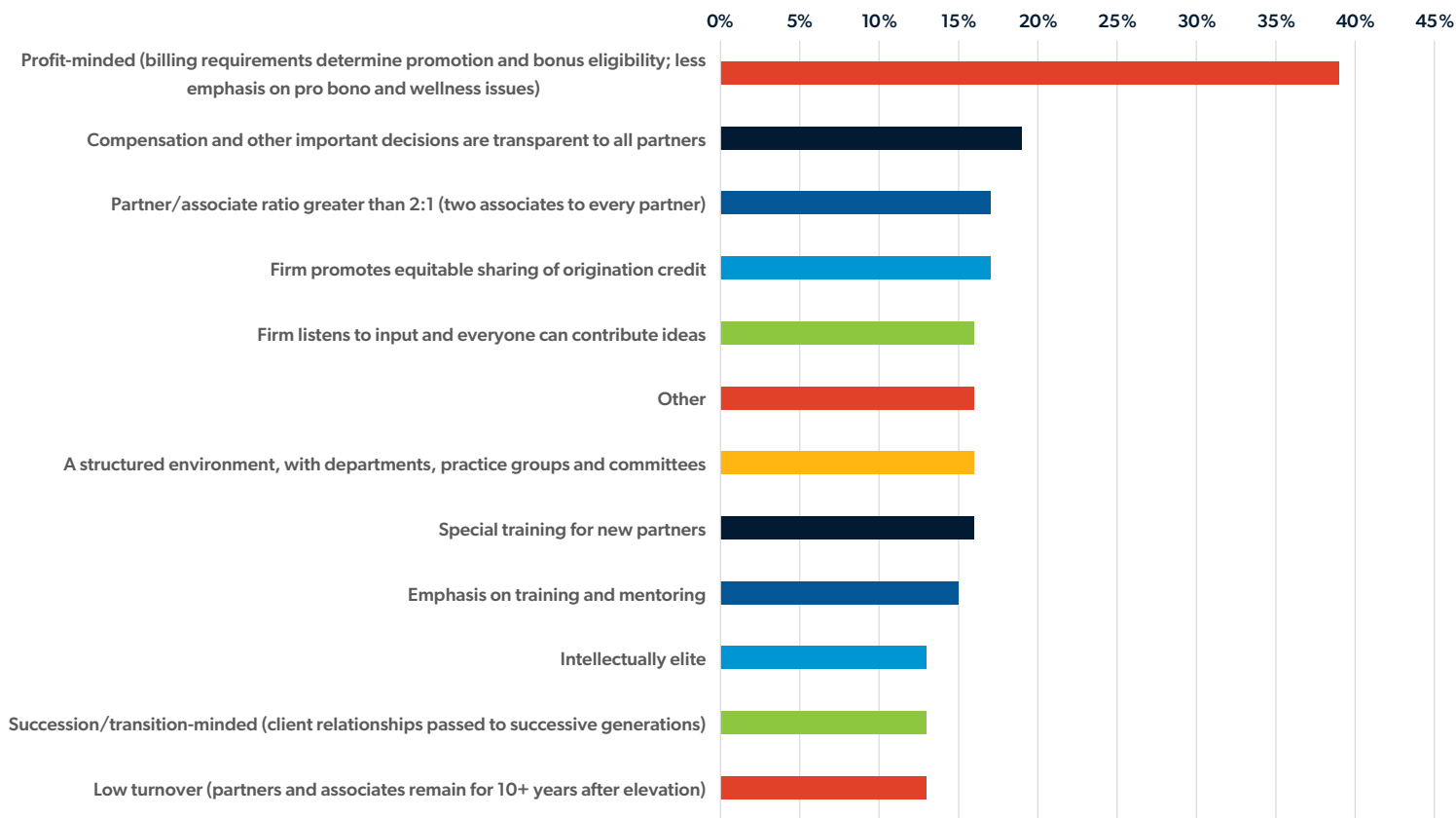
Just as high-quality performance expectations ranked second among traits that best embody respondents' firms, it also ranked second—up 19 percentage points and three places—among the traits that inspire the most positive feelings about respondents' firms. Lawyers like to hold themselves to a high standard. In that vein, emphasis on continued learning via training and mentoring remains among the top 10 traits lawyers value.

Which 10 traits inspire your most negative feelings about your firm?

Several traits in this category, particularly those relating to compensation and other internal financial metrics, are known only to partners. While everyone may know when the firm is focused on capacity and productivity, i.e., is being profit minded—again, the top vote getter in this category—only partners know what compensation everyone earns and how other important decisions get made. Hence, fewer responses were received for some of these traits than for others.

Transparency, or the apparent lack of it, in compensation and important decisions jumped eight places to land in second place among traits that inspire negative feelings about one's firm. Ironically, it displaced sharing of origination credit, which dropped two places but remains one of the top five traits respondents dislike about their firm. Having two key economic issues among the top five traits lawyers dislike about their firm should send a strong message to management that openness about the compensation process, at least, is critically important to many lawyers.

While transparency experienced a substantial leap from its prior ranking position, the fact that it received just 19% of responses may stem from the fact that it is a trait only partners can truly address. It may also reflect that while some (19%) may believe more transparency is needed, the great majority (81%) do not.



Which 10 traits would you like to see more prominently reflected or valued in your firm’s culture?

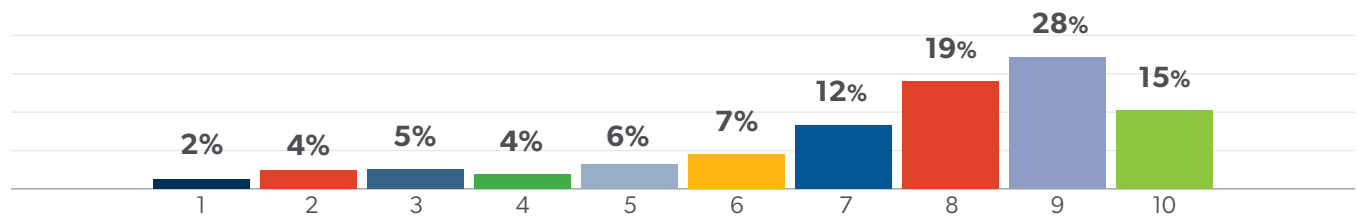
The top five traits respondents would like to see more represented in their firm’s culture largely focus on factors essential to law firm continuity, including: 1) emphasis on training and mentoring, i.e., readying the next generation for their time in leadership; 2) supporting attorneys’ well-being and work-life balance, i.e., keeping talent fresh and ready to deliver high-quality performance; 3) being transparent about compensation and important decisions in order to maintain stakeholders’ buy-in; 4) listening to input, to keep everyone both invested in a common purpose and believing they are fairly compensated; and 5) being succession minded, so that transitions can be anticipated, managed and occur without hiccup.

Perhaps not surprisingly, wide gaps exist between partners and associates on some of these traits. For example, a 28-percentage-point spread exists between partners and associates on the desire to see greater focus on well-being and work-life balance (32% vs. 60%), and a 17-point spread exists on whether the firm supports greater diversity (41% vs. 24%), with associates questioning whether the firm is as committed as it suggests. A smaller 12-point gap exists between partners and associates on the adequacy of training and mentoring (36% vs. 48%), supporting women and lawyers of color being in leadership (36% vs. 24%), and whether the firm listens to all stakeholders (43% vs. 31%).



On a scale of 1-10, how would you rank your firm's culture?

(1 being wholly inconsistent with your personal values and 10 being totally consistent with your values)



Seventy-four percent of respondents assigned a value of 7 or above on a 10-point scale (10 being highest) to indicate how closely their current firm's values align with their personal values. Considering that 65% of respondents report having been at a prior firm, and the same percentage say their prior firm had a materially different culture than their current firm—with which they align at 74%—it appears many who left a prior law firm chose a new firm whose culture is more aligned with their personal values.

On a scale of 1-10, how would you characterize your firm's commitment to each of the following?

(1 being wholly inconsistent with your personal values and 10 being totally consistent with your values)

	Diversity, equity, and inclusion	Work-life balance	Supporting working parents	Mentorship	Transparency
1	4%	5%	4%	6%	12%
2	6%	3%	4%	6%	6%
3	5%	5%	6%	5%	5%
4	5%	6%	3%	7%	5%
5	10%	8%	9%	8%	7%
6	4%	7%	8%	9%	7%
7	10%	12%	9%	14%	11%
8	18%	18%	19%	18%	13%
9	15%	15%	13%	12%	12%
10	24%	21%	24%	16%	22%

Law firms' commitments to each of the following traits appear to have declined in this survey from the 2022 survey: diversity, equity and inclusion (from 68% to 66%), well-being/work-life balance (from 67% to 65.5%), supporting working parents (from 68% to 66%), mentorship (from 63% to 59%), and transparency (from 61% to 57%). While none of these declines represent a material variance from the prior survey, the across-the-board nature of the declines in every category that makes lawyers feel seen, valued and understood as people with other interests does reflect a diminishing value of those traits, which some lawyers consider important in deciding whether to stay with or leave a firm.

Among lawyers of color, Hispanics, representing 6% of respondents, ranked their firm's commitment to DEI, higher than average (86% vs. 66.5%). The same holds true for commitment to well-being/work-life balance (81% vs. 65.47%), supporting working parents (80% v. 66.23%), mentorship (72% vs. 59.22%) and transparency (62% vs. 56.56%). Conversely, Asian-Pacific lawyers, representing 5% of respondents, assigned the lowest, and lower than average, rankings to their firm's commitment to the same five traits: DEI (56%), well-being/work-life balance (45%), supporting working parents (42%), mentorship (56%) and transparency (51%).²

² Response size from each group increased over the inaugural survey: Hispanics, 6% vs. 4%, Asian Pacific, 5% vs. 2%, African Americans, 3% vs. 2%. Mixed race responders remained at 2%. We have not summarized responses for groups registering less than 5%.

Would you say your firm is focusing on the right/most important cultural priorities? If not, what could be improved?

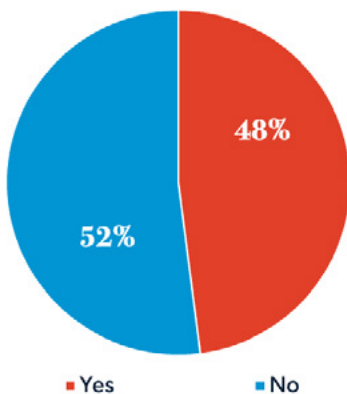
DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION **MENTORSHIP**
TRANSPARENCY **WORKING PARENTS** **POLITICS**
PRO BONO **ORIGINATIONS**
NOT SHARED
EQUITABLY
TOO MUCH FOCUS ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION **WORK-LIFE BALANCE** **PROFITABILITY**
WELLNESS **COMPENSATION**
LIP SERVICE

Respondents offered a wide range of comments on whether their firm’s cultural priorities are in line with their own values. A selection of the responses we received to this question can be found in Appendix 2.

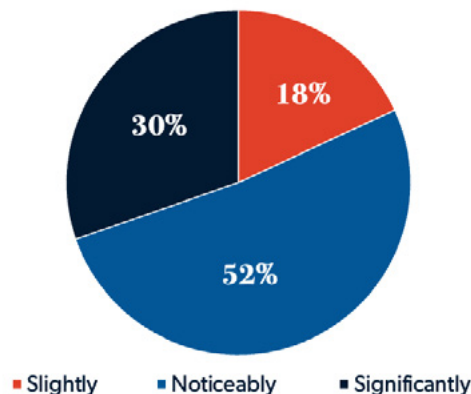
Has your firm’s culture changed?

The single widest variance in responses between the current and prior surveys concerns change, particularly whether respondents feel the culture of their firm has changed since they arrived. In the inaugural survey, 82% of respondents felt their firm’s culture had in fact changed. In this survey, only 48% of respondents feel their firm’s culture has changed. Significantly, by a margin of 52%-48%, respondents believe the change to their firm has been slightly more negative than positive, which could be attributable to any number of factors, including transitioning from COVID lockdown to return-to-work, and increased focus on billing and collecting in a sluggish transactional market.

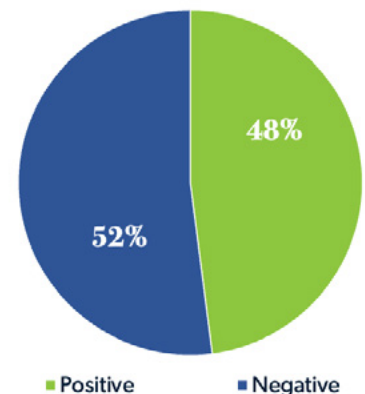
Has the culture of your firm changed since you joined?



How much has the culture at your firm changed since you joined?



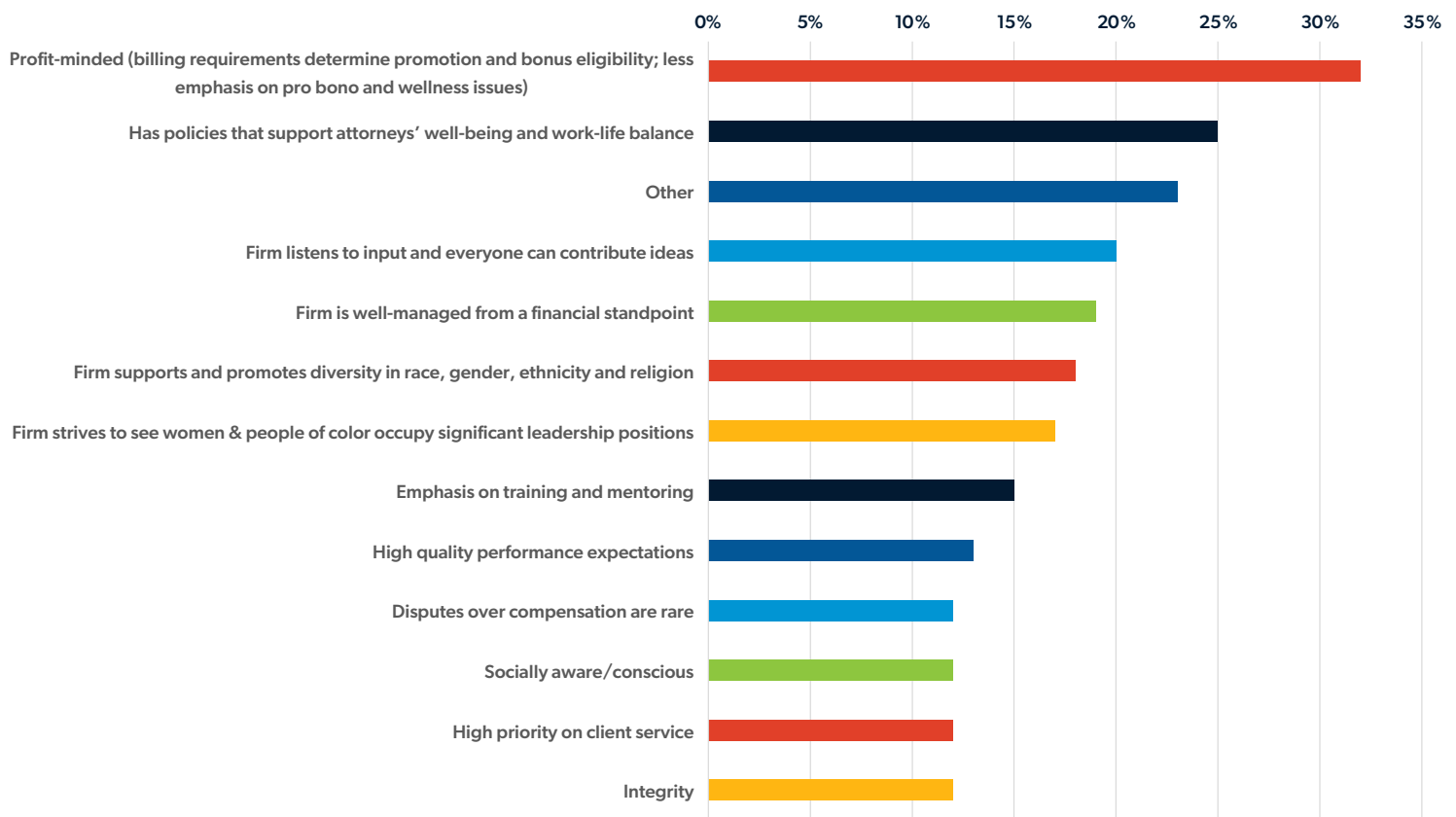
Has the change been:



The prior survey was launched in March 2022, just as the pandemic was ending, a period that saw significant increase in lawyer mobility in and out of law firms, partly caused by the widespread adoption of remote working during that period. Since that time, economic conditions and the Fed’s fight against inflation have resulted in a stagnant transactional environment, reducing the demand for many types of corporate expertise. This has had a ripple effect across the industry and has swung market power back to law firms, and they are demanding more time back in the office.

Finding the right balance between in-office and remote work has been and remains a challenge for many firms and can present points of conflict and disgruntlement, leading to departures. Lawyer movement in and out of law firms, along with the energy, ideas and efforts that move with them, is one of the most significant influencers of change in law firm environment and culture.

To what traits do you attribute the change?



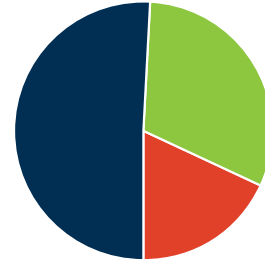
For those who noted a change in their firm’s culture, profit-mindedness was again cited as the trait that most represents the change they feel in their firm, at a higher rate than in the previous survey (32%-26%). It is also one possible reason respondents feel change has been negative. On the other hand, law firms appear to be listening to the rising demand for greater focus on well-being and work-life balance, as 25% of respondents—a full 10 percentage points more than in the prior survey—cite policies supporting these traits “as changes they now see in their firm. Other traits that have changed include “firm listens to input and everyone can contribute ideas,” and the firm is well-managed, financially. These traits displaced diversity and supporting women and people of color for positions in leadership, both of which moved down in ranking but remain among the top 10 traits respondents believe have changed since they arrived.

Do you view your firm to be:

Fifty-six percent of Hispanic respondents believe their firms have improved on training and mentoring. No trait was cited by more than half of Asian-Pacific respondents as having reasonably changed.

As before, a majority of respondents are optimistic about their firm, believing it to be on the rise, while only 18% believe their firm to be falling behind. Twenty-six percent of Asian-Pacific respondents, the highest percentage among all groups, believe their firms to be falling behind.

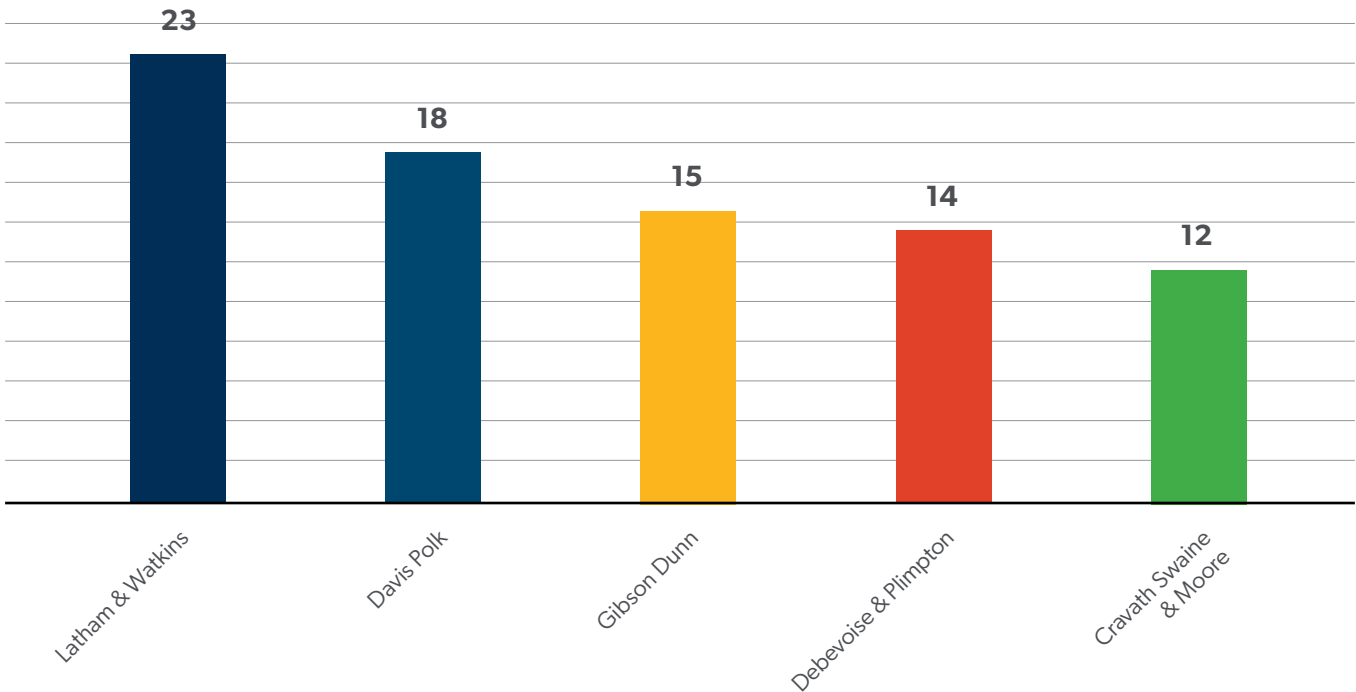
51%
On The Rise



30%
A Stalwart Of The
Corporate Legal
Community

18%
Falling Behind
Peers

Name five firms with culture similar to your firm:



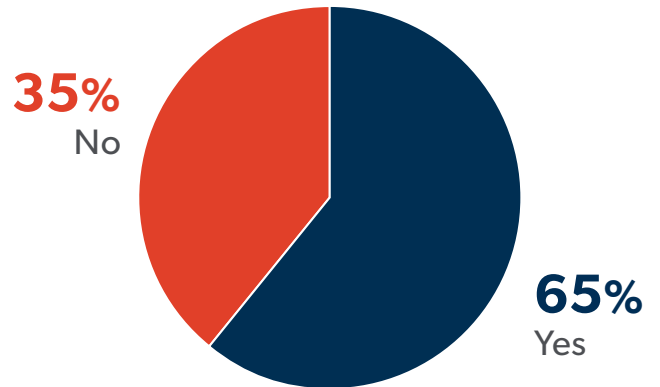
Without noting whether the similarities were positive or negative, 23 respondents listed Latham & Watkins as having a similar culture to their own firm, followed by Davis Polk, Gibson Dunn, Debevoise & Plimpton, and Cravath Swaine & Moore

Name five firms whose culture you admire.

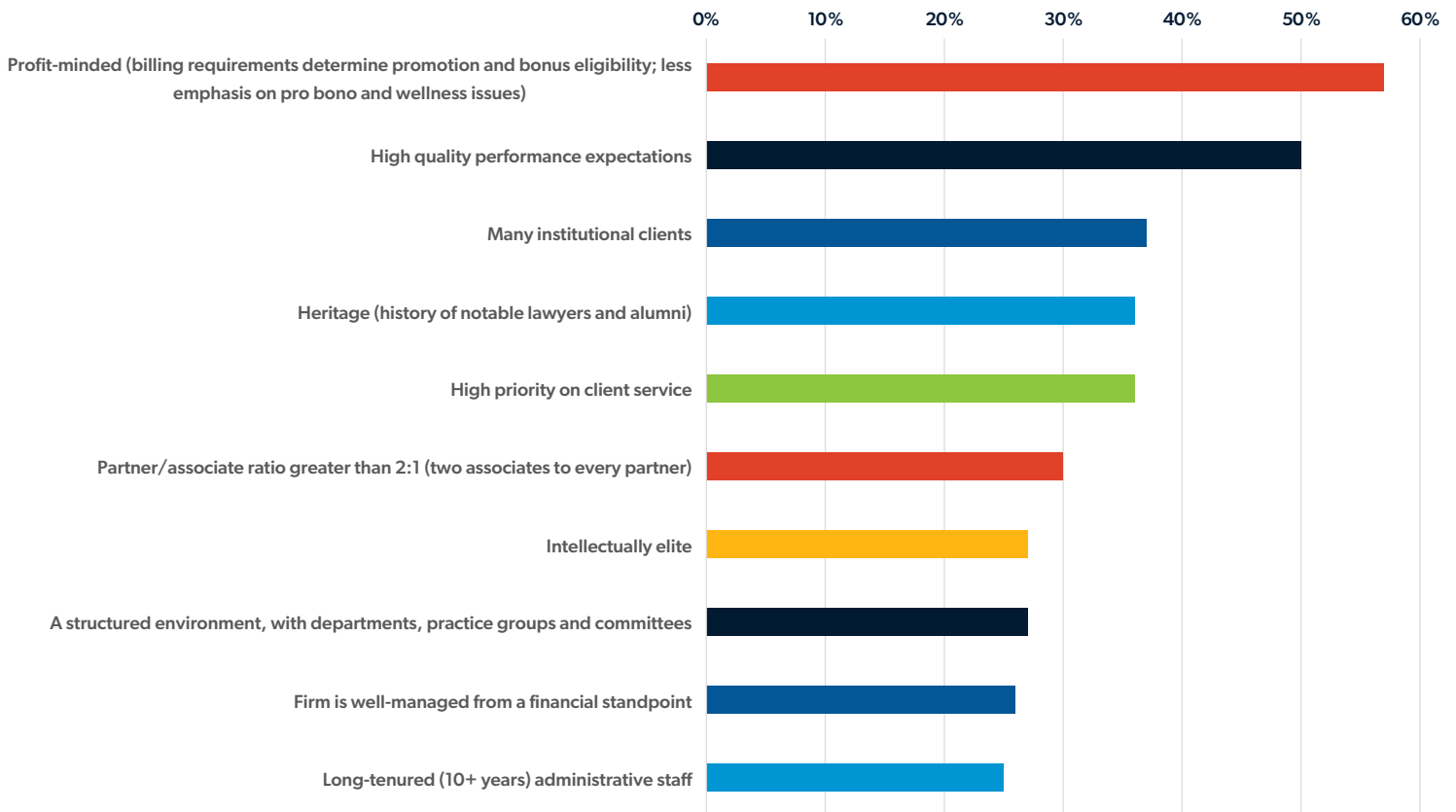
Orrick, which did not make the top 10 in this category in the inaugural survey, was the top vote getter as most admired firm. Close behind and tied for second place were Gibson Dunn, a returning top five member, and another newcomer, Sullivan and Cromwell. Third place also presented a multi-party tie between four firms: Cleary Gottlieb, Cravath Swaine & Moore, Simpson Thacher and Wachtell Lipton.

Have you ever worked in a firm that had a materially different culture than your current firm?

Sixty-five percent of respondents have worked at a firm with a materially different culture than their current firm. Seventy-four percent of respondents indicated the culture of their current firm strongly aligns with their personal values. Hence, it appears that those who moved from one firm to another sought a home more in line with their personal values.



If so, which 10 traits are most representative of that firm's culture?



Traits respondents cite their prior firms as having include being profit-minded, expecting high-quality performance, having many institutional clients, having a heritage of notable lawyers and alumni, being or considering itself intellectually elite, having a traditionally structured environment (i.e., departments, committees, etc.) and having long-tenured administrative staff. These traits are emblematic of the oldest and largest law firms, aka “Big Law,” and suggest many respondents began or spent some portion of their career in that environment.

Appendix 3 includes a selection of the comments we received from respondents for this prompt.

When you discuss your firm with lateral interviewees, how do you describe the firm’s culture?

TRANSPARENT
HIGH/TOP/ELITE
QUALITY WORK

COLLEGIAL

**WORK-LIFE
BALANCE**

FLEXIBLE GREAT/NICE/SMART PEOPLE **EXCELLENCE**

SERVICE **FAMILY** **FRIENDLY** **SUPPORTIVE**

COLLABORATIVE **ENTREPRENEURIAL**

How important is it to have a strong law firm culture?

Eighty-seven percent of respondents believe law firms should have a strong culture.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

What seems inevitable is that the rising Gen Z cohort will usher in notable changes and true disruption to the old ways law firms have done business for decades. As the first digital generation, having lived with technology from the cradle, they are highly mobile and able to execute from any location. That mobility is the hallmark of their generation, the generation of the “gig” (short-term engagement) and “share” economies, represented by such transactional service companies as Uber, Lyft, Airbnb, Bird, Lyme, Turo, Zipcar and many others.

They are also the first generation to grow up with a real sense of dread; a sense that they won't do as well as their parents, to say nothing of possibly doing better. Given such existential issues as climate change and school shootings as well as social, civic and economic issues such as attacks on public and private institutions, challenges to democracy and the First Amendment, and extreme wealth inequality, they eschew many of the things valued by their predecessors—most notably Baby Boomers—as hallmarks of status and success. Instead, they seek lifestyles of practical and sustainable balance, free of heavy corporate requirements, structures and procedures, and with an increased focus on self-care.

To coax enough of this rising cohort, which lives at the intersection of law and technology, to remain vested in a traditional long-term law firm career will require some yielding by law firms toward the issues they favor, including wellness and work-life balance, training and mentoring, and succession planning. And that may yet be a good and evolutionary thing.

CONCLUSION

We remain impressed that lawyers across the spectrum continue to place high value—indeed, the highest value—on client service, and hold themselves and their own performance to a high standard—a standard even higher than the value they assign to integrity and financial management. It is also encouraging to see increased responses from women and lawyers of color, as well as firms' ongoing commitment to DEI and increasing accommodation of rising generations' requests for more focus on well-being/work-life balance, succession planning and transparency. Going forward, firm leaders may wish to engage the desire for greater emphasis on training and mentoring and invite greater input on internal issues, including compensation, if they want to retain the top crop of the next generation.

These and other insights justify continuing this conversation, albeit on a more regularized basis. Hence, our next survey will launch in late 2025, and thereafter reissue on a biannual basis. With each cycle, we hope culture will become clearer to lawyers and management, so that opportunities for addressing and reconciling cultural flash points or emerging or widening variances can arise, and strong culture can be preserved.

APPENDIX 1: CULTURAL TRAITS

These are the cultural traits respondents were presented with for questions asking them to select traits as they relate to their current firm.

- Heritage (history of notable lawyers and alumni)
- High quality performance expectations
- High priority on client service
- Partner/associate ratio greater than 2:1 (two associates to every partner)
- Civic minded (encourage or award credit for pro bono work and/or public service)
- Profit-minded
- Long-tenured (10+ years) administrative staff
- Has policies that support attorneys' well-being and work-life balance
- Emphasis on training and mentoring
- Firm is well-managed from a financial standpoint
- People socialize with their firm colleagues away from the office
- Integrity
- Intellectually elite
- Firm supports and promotes diversity in race, gender, ethnicity and religion
- Many institutional clients
- Succession/transition-minded (client relationships passed to successive generations)
- Firm does big things
- Special training for new partners
- Low turnover (partners and associates remain for 10+ years after elevation)
- Firm events regularly or occasionally invite employee's family member/s
- Firm promotes equitable sharing of origination credit
- Firm strives to see women & people of color occupy significant leadership positions
- Compensation and other important decisions are transparent to all partners
- Disputes over compensation are rare
- A structured environment, with departments, practice groups and committees
- Firm listens to input and everyone can contribute ideas
- Socially aware/conscious
- Other

APPENDIX 2: CULTURAL PRIORITIES

Below is a curated selection of comments provided in response to the following prompt: “Would you say your firm is focusing on the right/most important cultural priorities? If not, what could be improved?” We have organized them into several categories we feel illustrate the major themes that were identified by the respondents.

In-House Culture

“No. As an in-house attorney, the company culture is awful. Leadership isn’t transparent and [it] takes forever to make critical decisions that [which then] hold up legal work, and the business then gets angry at legal. No importance is placed on personal/family mental/physical well-being. Understaffed/overworked is a business model; we need more attorneys and a clear structure within the legal department, as well as leadership. Attorneys should be supported by their managers.”

DEI/Well-Being/Work-Life Balance

“The firm needs to walk the talk on DEI efforts and mental health & wellness programs.”

“No. The firm needs more intellectual balance. It is lost in its shallow progressiveness.”

“For the most part, yes, but way too much emphasis on DEI.”

“No. There is a growing cultural divide with boomer partners failing to equitably share origination credit, transition client relationships, or meaningfully advance DEI issues beyond empty statements on the website.”

“Mostly. We do great on DEI priorities. But I would like to see more structured/sponsored events outside of the office to promote collegiality. The firm used to have a holiday party where spouses were invited, but that was cut several years ago. Especially after the pandemic, I feel like I don’t know many of my new coworkers.”

“I am so beyond tired of the diversity, equity, inclusion speeches. Even as a minority, it is TOO MUCH and I believe all firms should take a breather and just hire attorneys that [who] are the most competent for the job, have a solid work ethic, and have integrity, regardless of any other factors such as those preached in diversity, equity, and inclusion workshops.”

“The firm is focused on the appearance of some important cultural priorities (DEI of women/BIPOC), but not necessarily actually doing the things needed to actually promote such diversity. We also need to focus more on succession planning. The top-level partners continue to hold on to their positions, not allowing newer (but still

10+ years experience) partners to come in and lead. Finally, the firm completely lacks transparency in decision-making and compensation.”

Integration

“The firm does not provide sufficient guidance for lateral attorneys joining the firm. With many attorneys never having worked anywhere else, the tendency is to assume that new laterals will know these preferences. Criticism is harsh when a ‘rule’ is not followed, despite the fact that there’s no way for a lateral to know what the ‘rule’ is.”

“I have seen several attorneys leave within the 7 months I have been here. It would be nice to know that lawyers stay for more than a few years.”

“Love the place! 30+ years of experience in the field, made lateral equity partner move 3 years ago. I am very impressed with the talent, client management sophistication, and collegial nature of the partnership and firm as a whole. There is a solid balance between profitability and the impact of excessive pursuit of profit on the culture.”

Profit Minded/Business Oriented

“Yes. My firm’s priorities are serving clients well and [serving] growth. Those are the two key priorities, as serving clients well brings more work. More work brings the ability to hire more associates.”

“No, I would not. It is a boys club that is singularly fixated on getting everyone to return to the office 5 days a week and billing as many hours as possible with zero regard for other people’s job satisfaction, work/life balance, or mental health. Female attorneys are leaving in droves and I have no idea why other than I am miserable too. We are beyond top heavy to the point where I am personally doing doc reviews as a partner. It’s unsustainable and I badly need a change of scenery.”

“No, it has become a cold sweatshop in the last several years with the number of attorneys increasing [to] 3 times as many as there were.”

“No. I think we need to focus more on profitability if we are going to attract and retain the best attorneys.”

“Currently, firm only seems to be focused on collections and making budget and trying to assimilate new attorneys from recent merger. Unfortunately, we are adopting practices of the firm that we merged with, which is lessening the culture that we had.”

“A lot of focus on hours. Almost no focus on training and mentorship. New York has no bonus target, whereas other offices do. Business development does not count.”

“There is a shift occurring in our culture. Previously, I would have said that we were more focused on having an enjoyable work atmosphere for decent pay and it has shifted in the last decade to demanding more hours but for

increasing pay, and there is no room for anyone who isn't on board. The culture has shifted accordingly. That is what the firm has gotten wrong—we had it right all along.”

“Current management wants to keep everyone happy/ruffle as few feathers as possible. That is impossible in the current culture. I would much prefer for stances to be taken (but then, of course, only if they are my stances).”

“For the most part yes. It is a traditional firm that is largely business and work focused, which is not such a bad thing. Firms don't always need to be a 'family.' It can still be an operating unit without the collegial community emphasis.”

Generations/Succession

“No. There is a growing cultural divide with boomer partners failing to equitably share origination credit, transition client relationships, or meaningfully advance DEI issues beyond empty statements on the website.”

“No. Transparency and succession.”

“No. I think we are too focused on the present and not enough forward-thinking.”

“Mostly, but not always. Could focus more on long-term priorities/growth.”

“As a small boutique, we frequently do not have the time to do strategic planning. We react the client's immediate needs. We do not think about where we will be in five years.”

“Although our firm prides itself on succession planning, my direct recent experience is that there are a chosen few who are seen as the next generation and they are treated as firm royalty, and are brought in as successors in long-standing client relationships. Other attorneys who are equally smart and hardworking but who do not fit that mold are not given the same opportunities. Additionally, our origination policy is poorly written, does not account for all variables and encourages originating partners to be selfish. Accordingly, it is much harder, if not impossible, to make equity partner as it is harder to crack the origination thresholds required to get there, as originations are not shared equitably and relationships are not shared.”

“I believe the firm is attempting to find the right balance between promoting cultural values of different generations of lawyers within the firm and supporting the future growth of the firm; however, it is not an exact science.”

“The firm is focused on the appearance of some important cultural priorities (DEI of women/BIPOC), but not necessarily actually doing the things needed to actually promote such diversity. We also need to focus more on succession planning. The top-level partners continue to hold on to their positions, not allowing newer (but still 10+ years experience) partners to come in and lead. Finally, the firm completely lacks transparency in decision-making and compensation.”

“My firm needs to work more to figure out how the 'new generation' works rather than trying to make young associates fit the ideals of the Old Guard.”

Transparency

“No. Transparency and succession.”

“The firm is focused on the appearance of some important cultural priorities (DEI of women/BIPOC), but not necessarily actually doing the things needed to actually promote such diversity. We also need to focus more on succession planning. The top-level partners continue to hold on to their positions, not allowing newer (but still 10+ years experience) partners to come in and lead. Finally, the firm completely lacks transparency in decision-making and compensation.”

“It’s a mix. Leadership is not transparent, it’s all very top down bureaucratic. Very sad what the firm has become since merging.”

“Yes (for the most part). Our firm has a strong reputation and excellent lawyers, but it also focuses on its pro bono program and generally affords flexibility to its lawyers and staff. I would like to see more transparency in the compensation process, which I realize is a common issue (or series of them) among ‘Big Law’ firms.”

Cohesion/Togetherness

“Mostly. We do great on DEI priorities. But I would like to see more structured/sponsored events outside of the office to promote collegiality. The firm used to have a holiday party where spouses were invited, but that was cut several years ago. Especially after the pandemic, I feel like I don’t know many of my new coworkers.”

“I generally support our leadership but I feel very little connection with my partners and the efforts to improve this are misguided.” No. The firm does not seem to be making any progress toward returning to a pre-pandemic culture and lifestyle, and as a result firm culture has changed significantly. Since April 2022, there has been a ‘requirement’ to be in the office three days a week; however that “requirement” has never been enforced and many people don’t comply. When people are in the office, they leave early. Before the pandemic, we probably averaged six days a week in the office and I would guess that now most people average 2-3, there are often days that I don’t see anyone else on my floor. Before the pandemic, people spent time together outside of work, we would have dinner together when working late, there were a lot more firm events, and everyone worked with their doors open, would talk throughout the day, and the office had a great energy. All of those aspects of firm culture are gone now and the firm doesn’t seem to be taking any steps to revive the pre-pandemic culture.”

“Interaction amongst lawyers needs improvement. Our attys seem to operate in silos and the pandemic made this more apparent and more difficult to fix.”

“For the most part yes. It is a traditional firm that is largely business and work focused, which is not such a bad thing. Firms don’t always need to be a ‘family’. It can still be an operating unit without the collegial community emphasis.”

Great Society

“Yes. We seek diversity, we celebrate parenthood with generous maternity leave policies, allow flexibility, and celebrate involvement in pro bono and community volunteerism.”

“Firm focuses on the right priorities including employee well-being, honesty and integrity.”

“From a junior associate perspective, in large part yes. The firm does an incredible job of mentoring and training new lawyers, and most partners go out of their way to give useful feedback. Associates are often given opportunities to do substantive, meaningful work, like brief writing, oral arguments, taking depositions, etc. I also think the firm does a good job threading the needle of high productivity expectations and work-life balance. Our billable hour targets are ambitious, but reasonable, and the time off and remote work policies are appropriately flexible.”

Compensation

“No. There is a growing cultural divide with boomer partners failing to equitably share origination credit, transition client relationships, or meaningfully advance DEI issues beyond empty statements on the website.”

“The firm is focused on the appearance of some important cultural priorities (DEI of women/BIPOC), but not necessarily actually doing the things needed to actually promote such diversity. We also need to focus more on succession planning. The top-level partners continue to hold on to their positions, not allowing newer (but still 10+ years experience) partners to come in and lead. Finally, the firm completely lacks transparency in decision-making and compensation.”

“Yes (for the most part). Our firm has a strong reputation and excellent lawyers, but it also focuses on its pro bono program and generally affords flexibility to its lawyers and staff. I would like to see more transparency in the compensation process, which I realize is a common issue (or series of them) among ‘Big Law’ firms.”

“We have been making significant DEI attempts, but it is difficult in our market/practice areas. The biggest issue we face now is a very old-school, top-down approach to compensation.”

Misc.

“Management must stop cliques of just a few. Management must see how internal recruiters are an embarrassment to the firm.”

APPENDIX 3: DESCRIBING FIRM TO LATERALS

Below is a curated selection of comments provided in response to the following prompt: “How do you describe your firm to potential lateral hires?” We have organized them into several categories we feel illustrate the major themes that were identified by the respondents.

“I don’t. If I really trust the person who’s interested in my firm, I tell them the culture is poor and that they should look elsewhere unless they have no choice.”

“I avoid discussing the firm with lateral interviewees as I don’t want to be put into a position of being expected to gaslight them.”

“Like a family, collegial, no jerks allowed. Transparent regarding compensation and firm finances. Lots of autonomy.”

“Collegial, kind, inclusive.”

“Offices without borders.”

“Collegial high-quality legal work.”

“We work as a team to handle complex bankruptcy matters but do not charge as much as large firms, which gives us a competitive advantage.”

“Trade-off. Trade money for happiness and security.”

“We work really hard and are committed to the work we do on behalf of our clients. The firm is a team environment in terms of the work we do. The firm also understands that we all have lives and the firm respects a healthy work-life balance.”

“Adult.”

“Collegial. Emphasis on kindness and civility.”

“Entrepreneurial. Unlimited possibilities.”



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