



COACHING  
INSIGHTS  
REPORT  
2023

Coaching  
Consulting  
Assessments  
Outplacement  
Volta Coach Training  
Group Learning Experiences

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## Trends and Developments in Coaching in the U.S. Legal Industry

### Executive Summary

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## Who We Are

Volta Talent Strategies has one of the largest specialized lawyer coaching teams in the U.S. Dedicated to supporting law firms and legal departments, we provide leadership and executive coaching as well as career coaching. Based in New York, Chicago, Denver, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C., most of us have practiced as lawyers ourselves. All of us have spent years working with law firms and lawyers and, as we like to say,

“We speak lawyer fluently”

Working with over 90 law firms, including more than half of the Am Law 100, Volta is also a leading consulting and assessment company in the law firm talent management arena. We advise firms on initiatives and programs designed to support their recruitment, development and retention of lawyers and business service professionals. And, in support of law firms' diversity procurement and supplier programs, we are certified as a woman-owned and minority-owned business.



## About This Report

This is our third Coaching Insights Report. It is based on law firm responses to our Coaching Insights Survey. We published our previous reports in 2018 and 2021.

We are excited to share our full report with all those law firms that participated in our survey. It is intended primarily for partners and firm leaders interested in the use of coaching and Professional Development, Talent Management and HR professionals in law firms tasked with operating coaching programs and sourcing and managing coaching services. If you have received it because your firm participated in the survey, please keep it confidential and do not share it with any third parties outside your law firm. Volta is publishing the Executive Summary and extracts from the Report separately, which will be more widely available to those who did not complete the survey.

If you would like to quote or use any part of this report for any purpose outside your organization, please send your request to [Nicholas Jelfs-Jelf](mailto:Nicholas.Jelfs-Jelf@volta.com).

**USE OF PRONOUNS:** In this report, we use 'they' 'them' and 'their' as singular gender-neutral pronouns.

## Acknowledgments

The Volta Coaching Insights Survey is the largest and only industry-specific survey that specifically explores the use of coaching in law firms in the U.S. The number of law firms that responded to our 2023 Coaching Insights Survey was again up from our last survey in 2021. We are grateful to all the law firms who responded to our latest survey. In particular, those who took the time to respond to some of the questions that required more time. We also want to acknowledge and thank Anjali Desai of Foley & Lardner, Dani Rosetti of Buchanan Ingersoll, Jennifer Rakstad of White & Case, and Khara Kelsch of Steptoe & Johnson for sharing details of their firms' coaching for our coaching showcases.

Our thanks also go to [Casey Dixon](#) at [Dixon Life Coaching](#) for her feature section on ADHD.

## About The Authors

This report was authored by [Nicholas Jelfs-Jelf](#) and [Jacki Bostel](#), both of whom coach partners, counsel, associates, and senior business services professionals.



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Nicholas is a consultant and coach, based in New York. He is a former c-level executive at a global law firm, law firm partner, and practicing lawyer. Nicholas advises law firms on talent strategies, and coaches individual firm leaders, partners, and c-suite business service professionals with a focus on leadership, people management and business development.

Nicholas is a member of the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and a professional ICF-credentialed coach, having obtained the Brain-Based Coaching Certificate from [NeuroLeadership Institute](#). He is also certified as a master coach by the Behavioral Coaching Institute and certified to administer the EQ-i assessments focused on emotional intelligence and the Korn Ferry 360. He is also a [SHRM-SCP](#) and a [GPHR](#).



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Jacki is a coach based in New York. As a former law firm partner, she brings her lived experience and team management skills to coaching lawyers at all levels around issues they face every day, such as engagement, team dynamics, stress, and work/life balance and broader career goals, such as business development, leadership skills, career advancement and transitions.

Jacki is a member of the International Coaching Federation (ICF), having completed her ICF-accredited coaching certification through the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching ([iPEC](#)). She is certified as a Master Practitioner to deliver iPEC's Energy Leadership Index® assessment tool and is also certified in Mental Health First Aid.

## Survey and Research Highlights

In the last two years since our 2021 report, law firms have been navigating the latter part of the pandemic and figuring out how to manage their talent in the post-pandemic environment. Hybrid working continues, with firms' individual return to office journeys still unfolding. Hiring has eased but engagement remains a focus. It is not surprising that against this backdrop, the key themes that emerged from our survey related to the ongoing growth and professionalization of coaching in law firms, especially in the Am Law 100.

**Based on both our survey and our independent research, we have confirmed that no fewer than 106 law firms use coaching, including 81 of the Am Law 200 firms (ranked by revenue). Indications are that this is higher, possibly much higher.**

### COACHING BY MARKET SEGMENT



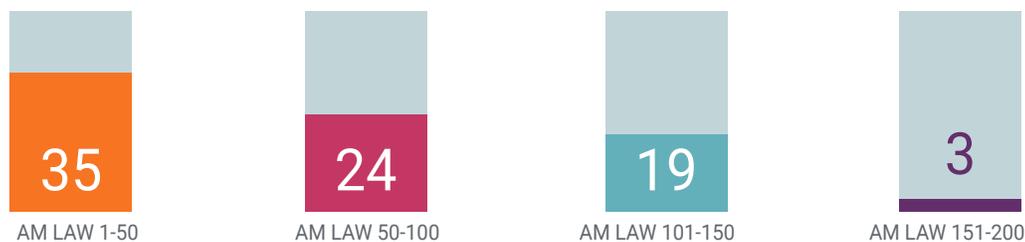
### KEY FINDING:

The use of coaching has increased across all segments of the Am Law 200. In terms of market segmentation, the higher you go up the Am Law 200 rankings, the more likely you are to find adoption and more widespread use of coaching.

Of our respondent firms that reported using coaching in 2023, **77%** reported having at least one internal coach (a small increase over 2021). The number of firms reporting that they use only internal coaches is still only a small minority.

N=81 (based on survey responses and independent research)

### USE OF COACHING BY AM LAW 200 RANKING



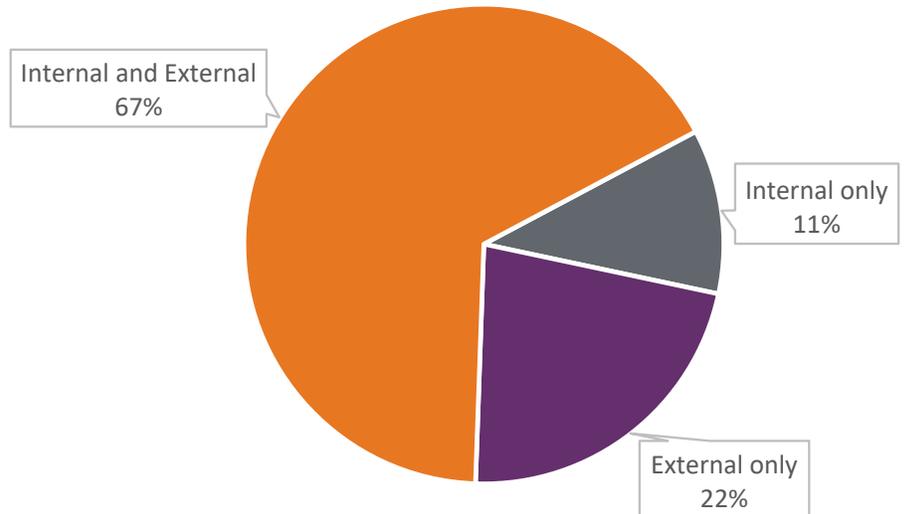
In addition to the Am Law 200 firms using coaching, firms from other market segments reported doing so, such as firms in the Global 200 (4) and the NLJ 500 (9) as well as boutique firms (12).

## KEY FINDING:

When we asked firms that use coaching whether they use internal or external coaches or both, two thirds of respondent firms told us they leverage both an internal coaching capability as well as external coaching faculty. Nearly a quarter of respondents use external coaches only, with a little above 10% of respondents using only internal coaches.

## INTERNAL vs. EXTERNAL vs. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COACHES

■ Internal only ■ External only ■ Internal and External



## Trends and Opportunities

When we asked our 2023 survey respondents what trends they see emerging in the next two years, they identified several themes:

"More awareness about how beneficial coaching is — now we have people requesting it who are high performers and want someone to talk to"

"Coaching as an add-on to larger scale group programs"

"Coaching as more of a standalone function versus a portion of someone else's preexisting job"

"More group coaching to help scale coaching to meet with increased demands"

"Motivation, engagement and talent development in a hybrid world"

"Increased scrutiny of vendors offering coaching services"

"More formal ROI assessment will be performed on coaching relationships"

Respondents see no let-up in the growth in and expansion of coaching based on a wider appreciation of the benefits. Trends identified by our respondents included:

## Increased **...AWARENESS OF THE BENEFITS OF COACHING;** **...DEMAND FOR COACHING.**

- More internal coaches, with firms expanding their existing programs.
- Greater availability of coaching, in part because of the growth in the number of internal coaches.
- A focus on retention, high-potentials and leadership.
- An expansion of coaching to business services professionals.
- An increase in both qualified and unqualified individuals offering coaching services to law firms, leading to increased scrutiny of providers offering coaching services.
- A greater overlap/cross-pollination with well-being and DEI.
- A move away from mentoring programs to coaching programs.

Asked what opportunities they see for coaching, our respondents identified their top five (in the percentages below):

### THE TOP FIVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COACHING IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS



While only one of our respondents highlighted neurodivergence and neurodiversity as a key topic area, we see emerging interest in this area. NALP recently established the Neurodiversity in the Legal Profession Task Force to review the barriers to inclusion of neurodiverse law students and lawyers including stigma, lack of understanding, and hesitancy to disclose/under reporting. In our full report, we include a feature section about coaching in the context of ADHD. Our thanks go to Casey Dixon for her contribution to this important discussion.

## Obstacles

When it comes to obstacles preventing law firms from developing or strengthening their coaching culture, our respondents identified:

- 46% Lack of understanding about what coaching is
- 38% Lack of budget
- 31% People hesitate to divert time away from other firm obligations for coaching
- 23% Coaching is too expensive
- 23% Inability to measure the effectiveness of coaching
- 21% Lack of resources to manage coaching
- 13% Lack of training for internal coaches
- 12% Lack of support from senior leaders
- 12% Concerns over individual or firm confidentiality
- 8% The firm's culture does not support it

Despite the growth in the number of coaches and the deployment of coaching, it is notable that *“lack of understanding about what coaching is”* remains the number one obstacle, as it was in 2021. It appears that coach practitioners—both internal and external—and talent functions still have work to do to better explain and advocate for coaching to prospective sponsors and participants within law firms. The good news in this context is that the share of respondents citing this as an obstacle has dropped from well over half (57%) in 2021 to 46% in 2023.

*“Lack of budget”* has taken over from an *“inability to measure the effectiveness of coaching”* as the second most reported obstacle. This may reflect the changing economic outlook or the fact that in a demand-led context, firms may not wish to write a blank check for all the coaching that is proposed or requested.

One big shift we noted is that in 2021—to our then surprise—28% of respondents told us that there were no obstacles because their firms already had coaching cultures. The “none” crowd this year represents a much smaller percentage at 13%. Perhaps the definition of what it means to have a coaching culture continues to evolve and be better understood?

## And AI? What About AI?

We like to crystal ball about the future so what was notable for us was that only one survey respondent identified the use of AI in coaching as a trend. It was therefore not surprising that none of the respondent firms reported using AI-powered coaching applications. Not one! Despite this, we think it's an area worth exploring, not just because ChatGPT took the world by storm last year but also because there are companies actively looking to harness AI in the context of coaching. How will it work? What will it be like? How will AI coaches compare with their human counterparts? We take a look at AI and coaching in a feature section in our full report.

## Our Predictions

As firms accelerated out of the pandemic and remote working phases that characterized 2020 through early 2023, firms continued to push to expand in-office engagement. Virtual and remote coaching however remained the norm owing to its flexibility and convenience. We believe that this will continue.

As for other predictions, we are re-upping some of our 2021 predictions since we believe that they still hold:

Increased democratization of coaching: Coaching will expand across different levels within law firms and across both the legal and business services functions.

Increased clarity as to the roles of internal coaches and their scopes of work.

Increased expectations and demand for coaching from partners and associates.

Increased focus on coaching for high-potential employees.

Increased monitoring of and accountability required from internal and external coaches.

Increased focus on measuring and monitoring the effectiveness and ROI of coaching.

## Our Predictions continued

Increased use of 360 feedback and other assessments.

Increased sophistication of coaching apps and AI-based coaching tools being developed by commercial third-party providers.

More developed and more sustained coaching cultures.

Increased adoption of coaching apps and AI-based coaching tools as a supplement to in-person coaching.

Expansion of career coaching by large law firms to their alumni networks.

An increased focus on “leader as coach”.

Ongoing development and acceptance of AI technologies in the context of “coaching” taken in its broadest interpretation.

One 2021 prediction that did not come to fruition and has been slow to take off is team coaching. We saw the ICF's introduction in 2020 of its new team coaching competencies as a potential turning point but, in our experience, the deployment of team coaching has not materialized as we anticipated.

## Conclusion

In short, coaching in US law firms is thriving. The evidence for that is before you. Law firms' understanding and deployment of coaching continues to grow and evolve and some firms are becoming sophisticated buyers of coaching services. In our full 2023 Volta Coaching Insights Report, we share detailed data and commentary behind the headlines in this Executive Summary.

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January 2024



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