

THE VOLTA COACHING INSIGHTS REPORT 2018

TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN
COACHING IN THE US LEGAL INDUSTRY



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1. Lawyer/Law Firm Business Development Coaching; and
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The use of coaching by law firms is undoubtedly increasing.

Specifically, the use of executive (and performance-focused) coaching by law firms continues to grow, having significantly lagged behind the uptake of such coaching in the corporate sector. During the recession, as involuntary attrition increased, many law firms within the Am Law 200 reactively adopted or expanded career counseling and career coaching as a tool to support lawyers who were being asked to leave.

Since then, firms have incorporated more proactive career coaching into their talent management approaches in order to better manage their associate pipelines and align them with opportunities for firm growth as well as individual advancement and promotion. As a result, career coaching (initiated both by the firm and by the individual) has taken root in many large firms as a key talent management tool.

KEY FINDING

The use of executive coaching is increasing in law firms, adding to a strong base of career coaching.

Law firms have realized that executive coaching is, in addition to career coaching, a valuable professional development (or PD) tool and have added it to their talent management toolkits – in some cases on an as-needed basis, in other cases on a more programmatic basis as an adjunct to (or replacement for) classroom-style training programs.

COACHING FOCUS

Career coaching is sometimes referred to as career counseling, transition coaching or outplacement coaching and other variations on these themes. It typically focuses on identifying the coachee's career goals (based on understanding their values, interests, talents and skills) and often supports a job search or career transition (itself sometimes associated with outplacement). In this report, we use the term career coaching to cover coaching under the categories of both career transitions and career development.

Executive coaching focuses on building or enhancing the coachee's knowledge and/or skills and/or transforming the coachee's mindset and behaviors to support the achievement of professional and organizational goals. In this report, we use the term executive coaching broadly to cover coaching on topics other than career transitions and career development.

The external coaching industry within the legal sector has two main components:

1. Firm-paid coaching: the firm is the client, identifies the coach (or a choice of coaches) and contracts with the coaching service provider to provide coaching to a partner or employee.
2. Individual-paid coaching: the individual lawyer is the client and identifies and contracts with the coach directly.

Internal coaching (in its various forms) may supplement or replace firm-paid coaching with external coaches. As we discuss in our main report, "coaching" is a term that is often used interchangeably with mentoring and counseling. This report focuses on internal coaching and firm-paid coaching provided by external coaches. It does not address the number or experiences of lawyers who seek out, and pay for, their own coaches. Nor does it address the work of writing coaches.

While **law firms are at different stages in terms of creating coaching cultures** and “coaching” as a term eludes a universal definition, they are recognizing more and more that coaching is valuable across their businesses in key constituencies such as leadership (firm management and practice leaders), partners and underrepresented groups (especially in the areas of business development (or BD), succession planning and diversity-related initiatives).

Coaching in law firms is evolving to go well beyond career coaching and corrective or “remedial” coaching (generally reserved for partners or senior attorneys whose management and communication styles interfere with team dynamics or cause potential legal risk). That said, it continues to be used in those ways.

Coaching is typically still one-on-one to leverage the ability of the coach and coachee to work on an individualized basis on highly specific topics. However, group coaching, team coaching and peer coaching are also on the rise. With the move by many organizations including some law firms (e.g., Hogan Lovells and Allen & Overy) toward performance management based on ongoing real-time feedback rather than the gargantuan and inefficient annual review processes which have traditionally underpinned law firm performance management, the importance of “leader as coach” will increase.

Finally, with the **rapid development of advanced technologies** (collectively artificial intelligence) we expect to see increased attempts to address coaching and career development needs through coaching apps. While various coaching apps (e.g., PocketConfidant) have been launched in the last couple of years, human coaches are still very much the norm. For the time being, coaching remains a discipline where personal service delivery is generally still viewed as essential to the experience and to the outcome.

Notwithstanding all these shifts and the increased adoption of coaching within law firms, there is, in sharp contrast to the corporate sector, a lack of commentary on the use of coaching within law firms. This is what prompted us to create our survey and this report. There has been no major survey or comprehensive report focused on coaching within law firms. A study on coaching in Am Law 200 law firms conducted in 2012 reported that 62 firms used coaching, with **14%** using internal coaches, **43%** using external coaches, and **43%** using both internal and external coaches.

SURVEY AND RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Of the Am Law 200 firms (ranked by revenue), we found that no fewer than 123 use coaching including:

22

of the top 25

44

of the top 50

36

of those firms ranked 51 to 100

43

of the second 100 (ranked 101 to 200)

Our 54 survey respondents included:

49

Am Law 200 firms of whom 20 are ranked (by revenue) in the Am Law top 50

2

Global 100 firms (not otherwise ranked in the Am Law 200)

89%

of survey respondents use coaching for their lawyers, and of those firms, nearly two-thirds (63%) see coaching as “extremely effective” or “very effective” in achieving organizational and individual goals.

Of our survey respondents not currently using coaching, the majority do not intend to start using coaching in the next 12 months. Reasons given for this were a lack of budget, previous negative experiences with coaching, and “our culture would not support it.” One firm noted that it is open to the idea of coaching but expects that it will take longer than a year to implement.

Law firms’ key focus areas for coaching generally are:

1. Career transitions
2. Business development
3. Executive presence
4. Presentation skills/public speaking
5. Communication
6. Leadership

The majority of respondents using coaching (64%) have regular coaching programs aimed at specific groups and cohorts within the firm, with the most active focus being on business development and leadership.

KEY FINDING

Group coaching is used by 35% of law firms, most commonly for BD. Other key findings appear in our full report.

39% of firms have one or more internal coaches, although very few firms reported having coaches whose time is exclusively devoted to coaching. The majority of those who coach internally do so in combination with other responsibilities, primarily PD and talent management. Fewer than 5% of firms use internal coaching only.

Internal coaches' efforts are generally more focused on associates and counsel, whereas partner coaching tends to be provided by external coaches.

COACHING TRENDS

Our survey respondents identified the following trends within the legal industry:

1. Mindset shift: An increased awareness of the potential benefit and value of coaching as a tool with a shift away from the mindset that coaching is only corrective or remedial.
2. More budget: An increased willingness to devote budget to coaching.
3. More coaching: An increased use of coaching as a resource, using both external and internal coaches.
4. More internal coaches: An increasing number of firms are building or expanding their internal coaching capabilities by hiring coaches, by sponsoring the training of employees within the PD function or by teaching coaching skills to lawyers and managers in other business services teams.
5. More BD coaching.
6. More group coaching.
7. More team coaching.
8. More focus on measuring effectiveness and ROI.
9. More peer coaching.

These trends align with many of those identified in recent research outside the legal industry. This is not surprising since the corporate sector is far larger and has more evolved coaching cultures. In effect, the corporate sector provides leading indicators of what we can expect to see in law firms. We therefore looked at reports on the use of coaching in the corporate sector to understand what can be learned from the experiences of other industries.

OUR PREDICTIONS

Based on our own research and experience over the last five years, we agree with our survey respondents in terms of the trends they identified. Overall, we believe that coaching will continue to expand and gain increasing acceptance in law firms as a professional development tool and will become the tool of choice for some firms. As a result, more law firms will adopt coaching programs and become more sophisticated consumers of coaching, whether provided by external or internal coaches. In addition, we expect to see the following developments over the next 12-24 months:

1. Coaching will expand across different levels within law firms and across both the legal and business services functions.
2. As firms' total investment in coaching increases, they will increasingly focus on measuring and monitoring the effectiveness and ROI of coaching.
3. As internal coaching capabilities expand, the role of internal coaches and their scopes of work will be more clearly defined and monitored.
4. Individual employees will increasingly expect and request coaching.
5. There will be an increased focus on coaching for high-potential employees.
6. There will be an increase in the use of coaching to further develop collaboration and teamwork.
7. Consistent with the increased adoption of coaching, there will be an ongoing increase in the use of 360 feedback and other assessments.
8. There will be an increase in the use of virtual/remote coaching (by phone or video calls).
9. Coaching apps and AI-based coaching tools will continue to be developed by commercial third-party providers and become more sophisticated as technology evolves.
10. Firms will review and test coaching apps and AI-based coaching tools and increasingly adopt them as a supplement to in-person coaching.
11. More firms will extend the provision of career coaching to their alumni networks and administrative staff.

Coaching is not simply an individual professional development tool. It has the ability to support transformative programs and initiatives in law firms at an organizational level. For example, if a firm wants to move away from a traditional command and control leadership structure to a flatter, people-centered structure where more leadership is distributed among the partners and senior administrators, then it will need more leaders. Coaching can help the firm develop those leaders both in terms of their own approach/skillset and how they support and lead their people. For firms looking to optimize their performance, coaching can help drive the necessary cultural shifts by changing mindsets and behaviors throughout the organization.

At Volta, we anticipate a bright future for law firm coaching. We are committed to being part of the ongoing development of coaching within law firms and advising and reporting on its use and impact in future years.

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