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April 3, 2007

Law students seeking to change the profession

Peter Lattman at the WSJ Law Blog has [this report](#) on an intriguing student effort to reform the legal profession. Here are the basics:

Last night, Stanford Law's Andrew Canter and Craig Holt Segall — along with roughly 125 students from the nation's top law schools — emailed hiring partners and recruiting coordinators at the [AmLaw 100](#) law firms. Their new organization, [Law Students Building a Better Legal Profession](#), wants the country's biggest law firms to sign-on to principles espousing a saner work environment for lawyers.

"We are writing as a group of over 100 law students to propose a change in the way we all experience our profession," the email begins. "We are working to ensuring that practicing law does not mean giving up a commitment to family, community, and dedicated service to clients."

Here is the [letter](#) sent to law firms, the group's [principles](#), its [findings of fact](#) and its new [Web site](#). The group's principles revolve around four themes:

1. Making concrete steps towards a transactional billing system;
2. Reducing maximum billable hour expectations for partnership;
3. Implementing balanced hours policies that work; and
4. Making work expectations clear.

The group asks the firms to commit to the group's principles. Prior to the fall interviewing season, it will let law students know which law firms have and haven't signed on. The group isn't going so far as to blackball firms that don't sign-on; rather, the principles are "an aspirational state we want the law firms to commit moving towards," explains Segall.

To get its message out, the group has conducted presentations at Stanford, Boalt, NYU, and Yale. "We believe that law students have the market power to address

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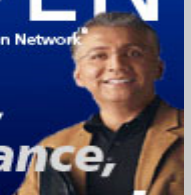
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key issues in the legal profession that associates no longer feel they can influence," says Canter.

Here's the kicker: The group wants less money. This is a labor movement asking for a smaller paycheck. "We recognize that changes in work structures come with an economic cost, and we are willing to be paid less in exchange for a better working life," the group says.

Does this effort seem comparable to the adventure of a snowball headed toward hell, or do you think this movement could have a chance of making an impact?

Posted by DAB

April 3, 2007 in [Legal profession realities and developments](#) | [Permalink](#)

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I don't think this has a chance in hell, given that many law students are opposed to what this group is trying to do. See http://www.autoadmit.com/thread.php?thread_id=606943&mc=141&forum_id=2

Posted by: [Anthony](#) | Apr 3, 2007 8:31:43 PM

There are many, many positions out there for people who want to work less and earn less.

Posted by: [Michael Risch](#) | Apr 3, 2007 9:18:25 PM

Students and law firm associates have said this individually for a long time. I think it is a great idea to articulate it as a group. It asks the right question, with the right concession.

There are jobs requiring fewer hours, but the pay gap between these jobs and big-firm positions is huge, and student loans create a massive debt for some students.

One primary beneficiary of these changes could be clients of those firms, because it might result in less overstaffing of cases.

Posted by: [Mark Osler](#) | Apr 4, 2007 9:15:01 AM

The law students have already had an impact. Aside from coverage in the Wall Street Journal, the buzz they're creating on the Web will cause every hiring partner to read the letter and check out the law students' website. The whole legal profession is not going to turn around on a dime, but this is one more good step toward sanity in the

discussion of quality of life and billable hours. In an online world, law students like everyone else have far more power than ever before.

Posted by: [Peter Marx](#) | Apr 4, 2007 10:44:22 AM

I applaud the students if for no other reason than organizing around the understanding that they, too, have ownership of the legal profession and have power to make changes in that profession. From the firms' perspective, firms do fear engendering the perception of being a "lifestyle firm." I happen to agree that, taken too far, an emphasis on "lifestyle" can attract individuals who aren't interested in working hard and committing to the firm. After all, associates don't begin to really pay off until after several years.

At the same time, the 2400+ billable hour firms have probably hit the point of diminishing or even negative returns with respect to how much work they expect to squeeze out of associates. If these students can demonstrate that they are the more desirable than those who don't sign on, they might well succeed.

I'm intrigued by what might come of this in years to come -- whether it succeeds or fails, if a group of committed future lawyers can stay in community, they may well become a powerful force in shaping the legal profession from within.

Posted by: [Gene Koo](#) | Apr 13, 2007 12:52:15 PM

I have master degrees (international law and Human rights) but I would like to obtain additional profession.
Is it possible?
Thanks in advance
Baku, Azerbaijan

Posted by: [Jamil Feyzullayev](#) | Aug 11, 2007 1:35:41 PM

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