

Mayer Brown Chair On Why Law Leaders Need To Listen More

By **Kevin Penton**

Law360 (May 13, 2022, 4:58 PM EDT) -- Law firms that expect to succeed in the coming years should prepare to listen to their attorneys and staffers about the best ways to move forward, rather than imposing directives from above, Mayer Brown LLP's chair said Friday.

There's no better way to drive away talent at a law firm than to institute a corporate hierarchy, said Jon D. Van Gorp during a keynote address that concluded Fordham University School of Law's Law Firm Management Program, a set of weekly sessions at the New York-based school with talks by leaders at various law firms in the country.



Jon D. Van Gorp

"Lawyers make a living on rules, but they don't like rules," Van Gorp said. "You have to direct behavior by using carrots, not sticks. You have to have people want to do it, not be told to do it."

Van Gorp, who took over as Mayer Brown's chair last June, said he concentrated on listening to law firm leaders and stakeholders as he began his three-year term, recognizing that the legal industry has changed drastically in the last three years.

"It used to be that you bloomed where you planted," said Van Gorp, referring to attorneys remaining at their firms for long stretches of their careers.

But increasingly, those who encounter challenges opt to move to a firm that they believe will be a better fit for them, rather than stick it out at a location where they may be unhappy, he said. One challenge for firms is to try to stay ahead of the changes they may need to make to improve, while concurrently ensuring that those who may have objections feel comfortable voicing them.

Van Gorp said he believes attorneys — and workers in a broad spectrum of industries — are not looking to work at a particular firm or company simply to collect a paycheck but because they are drawn to the particular platform that it offers. As a part of that initiative, firms should ensure that they are creating an inclusive atmosphere that promotes the well-being of all, including in areas such as mental, physical and financial health.

"An important point that I constantly think about is how to create a platform ... where people feel that they're getting something bigger than themselves," Van Gorp said. "It's delivering that to people in a

way that's meaningful to them, that makes them feel like this is the place where they want to work, this is the place where they want to build a career."

--Editing by Steven Edelstone.

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