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Mayer Brown NY Managing Partner On Retaining Top Talent

By Kevin Penton

Law360 (August 24, 2022, 3:48 PM EDT) -- Matthew Ingber joined Mayer Brown LLP as an associate in 1998, and never left. The managing partner of the firm's New York office says he is not alone.

Ingber says he is surrounded by colleagues who have worked most, if not all of their careers with the Chicago-based Mayer Brown, which he believes is a testament to the firm's ability to offer opportunities for growth in its numerous practices and offices.

Ingber took over as managing partner of the New York office in late 2018. Going back five years, the office has added 41 attorneys, including five since January. Ingber spoke recently with Law360 Pulse about the culture at his office, how it has adapted to a hybrid model of attorneys physically attending at least three days a week, and what he looks for in lateral hires.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Why do so many lawyers such as yourself choose to stay at Mayer Brown throughout their careers?

I think our retention of the people who have grown up at the firm is based on opportunities. Opportunities to engage with colleagues who they like and respect in a collaborative environment. Opportunities to engage with clients on cutting-edge litigation or high level and sophisticated deal work. I think it's a combination of the culture here, where people feel like they can make a career and the firm is going to invest back in them, and the opportunities that they get for working on deals or litigation that they find fulfilling and rewarding.

Speaking of culture, if folks are not in the office all the time, what are your strategies to be able to retain that culture that you feel makes Mayer Brown so distinct from its competitors?

It's a challenge for any managing partner of an office right now, how to create or maintain an office culture when the physical office is becoming less prominent than it used to be. I think in our case, we start with the premise that we had, historically, just a great collaborative culture. The goal is to figure out how to maintain that.

Flexibility is a very good thing. Flexibility is making our lawyers and our business services staff happier than they otherwise would be if every single day they needed to come into the office and not be able to put their kids on the school bus or attend a parent-teacher conference. This flexibility is a good thing for the industry and I think we should count that as a win.

On the other hand, I think we also need to embrace the fact that the benefit of being in the office — from mentoring, to training, to engagement, to observing the exercise of judgment in real time — we know is good for our associates. It is good for them to be sitting in meetings with partners who are on phone calls and being able to mute the phone and have conversations about strategy concerning opposing counsel on a deal or in litigation. That's how they learn and become better lawyers.

So to maintain a culture, I do think we need to have people consistently coming back to the office. Not every day, but consistently.

Who are you seeing come to the office more than three days a week? Is it associates, partners, or a mixed bag? Who appears to be embracing returning to the office?

I think it's a mixed bag. It's hard to say that this is generational. I think the effort to get back to the office starts with partners. I think partners need to lead by example because we are all focused on developing our associates, investing in their careers, presenting them with opportunities, engaging and mentoring them. That all can happen remotely, but it's more effective when it happens in person.

I'd say there are outliers, there are people who come into the office every single day without exception, there are some who perhaps are not coming in that minimum three days a week that we'd like them to. But there's a significant percentage of all of our people who are in the minimum three days. And I think they're seeing the value in being here.

When you are looking to bring in new attorneys to the office through lateral hires, what traits do you value?

The success of our business model depends in significant part on how we work together as partners, counsel, associates and staff. We all need to be collaborative, we need to work cross-office, we need to work cross-practice, we need to get the right people in front of our clients for whatever their needs may be. The way to continue to grow the business, to continue to deepen relationships with clients, is to work collaboratively. If I were to identify one quality in someone coming to our firm and to this office, [it] is someone who is willing to be collaborative.

When we talk about law firms, sometimes we talk about the business strategy and other times about the culture. It's been my view for many years that those two things are very much tied together. The more collaborative we are as colleagues, the easier it is to deepen relationships with our clients and to serve them well.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.
