






BY JOEL HOXIE
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL MERTZ

braving the job wilds

One cannot pick up a newspaper or glance at the television news these days without seeing reports about substantial layoffs and a sluggish economy. Some of our country's largest law firms have announced that they are trimming associates—and partners—from their ranks.



Has this change in the economy put law firms back in the “driver’s seat” when it comes to recruiting entry-level professional talent? That has not been our experience so far this fall as we work to fill our 2002 summer intern class. Notwithstanding the economic downturn in 2001 and, more recently, the events of September 11, it has pretty much been “business as usual” when it comes to our firm’s entry-level recruiting.

To be sure, there were some logistical challenges in the weeks following September 11—the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington DC, took place during the time our on-campus recruiting effort was in

our six offices.

Just as in past years, the task of recruiting our future attorneys has been a challenging one. There are still far too many good firms competing for the same pool of talent. Good student prospects continue to be heavily recruited, and we find that we have to work just as hard this fall as we have worked over the past three to four years to land the students on our short list.

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full swing. Consequently, some campus visits and student call-back trips had to be rescheduled while the airline industry was shut down. By the week of September 17, however, committee members were back on campus, and law students were busy coordinating trips to visit

One of the reasons the economic downturn has not had a direct impact on the search for entry-level legal talent is that the summer intern candidates for whom firms are now competing will not be coming on board as full-time attorneys until September 2003, at the earliest. On the other hand, lateral hiring—especially mid- to senior-level associates—has substantially



decreased this year, while calls to our offices from anxious headhunters have been on the rise.

The concerns expressed by law students have not changed all that much over the past few years. Many law students continue to focus on lifestyle issues. Lifestyle, however, seems to be a relative concept.

A number of law students from the Arizona law schools appear wary of falling prey to what they fear may be the “sweatshop” environment of a large Phoenix law firm. Meanwhile, their colleagues at national law schools located in other parts of the country find the lifestyle offered by virtually every large Phoenix law firm highly attractive when compared to the productivity expectations these days at major law firms in the largest markets.

the practitioner's toolbox

law job resources on the internet

www.azbar.org	On the State Bar's Web site is the Legal Career Center. Powered by legalstaff.com, the site has areas for job searchers and employers to post and look for jobs.
www.nalp.org/jobseekers/index.htm	The National Association for Law Placement provides a clearinghouse of information on legal career planning. There are no job listings, but turn here for salary trends, understanding the job search, alternative careers and more.
www.careers.martindale.com	This is an employment resource for lawyers and legal professionals, as well as those who seek to employ them.
www.lawjobs.com	On law.com, this search engine contains thousands of job postings, organized by region.
www.findlawjob.com	A job search area of the findlaw Web site, it boasts a huge searchable database: You e-mail your resume, and their staff attorneys create a custom letter addressed to hiring partners, revise your resume and produce addressed envelopes, which you then mail out.
www.acca.com/jobline/index.html	Searchable database of in-house counsel jobs, on the site of the American Corporate Counsel Association.
www.atlanet.org/jobbank/openings.ht	Job listings from the Association of Trial Lawyers of America.
www.eattorney.com	They boast a searchable database of more than 35,000 jobs nationwide, for attorneys and law students.
www.attorneyjobs.com	This site is frequently updated and provides information on jobs nationwide.
www.lawlinks.com and www.legalemploy.com	Links to legal employment sites and other attorney tools.

Law students also continue to factor compensation (primarily starting salary) into the decision-making process. However, starting salary information is publicly disseminated, so those who deem starting salary an important criteria are probably more likely to interview on campus only with firms whose starting salaries these students find acceptable or, in the final analysis, to select the firm offering the highest starting salary.

These students are the ones who vote with their feet.

We encounter very few law students who feel comfortable *discussing* compensation issues during interviews. Compensation issues, however, do need to be taken into consideration.

My fellow committee members and I are continually struck by the substantial school debt with which many law students are saddled when they graduate. As a result, many law students feel compelled to associate with those firms in the largest

markets paying the highest starting salaries with the thought (illusory or not) that they will be able to pay off much of their student debt in the first several years and then decide what they really want to do with their legal career.

Because of the burden of student loans and a host of other reasons, my committee has seen a marked shift over the past several years toward a short-term focus on the part of law students when it comes to evaluating law firm opportunities. Many law students today seem to have little interest

in selecting a firm where they think the chances are good that they will be promoted to partnership in six to seven years. For many, the partnership brass ring is neither a realistic nor desirable goal.

Many law students are content to find a high-paying job in a law firm for a couple of years rather than to select a firm from which to launch a long-term legal career. In fact, some students tell us that they view moving from firm to firm in their early years as an opportunity to get more exposure. I suspect headhunters have contributed to this phenomenon, by constantly contacting associates and trying to convince them to make a move to a firm where the grass is purportedly greener.

Is Arizona a highly popular destination for future attorneys these days? Arizona has always been an "off-Broadway" market: We tend to compete with cities such as Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Minneapolis and Seattle, rather than New York, Chicago, Los Angeles or Washington, DC. Yet Phoenix still attracts interest from students at top-tier law schools throughout the country.

From what we've seen, however, large Phoenix law firms have definitely felt a competitive pinch over the last several years as starting salaries at the leading firms in New York, Los Angeles and the Silicon Valley have skyrocketed. My hiring partner colleagues at firms in other off-Broadway cities tell me their firms have been similarly affected.

With the current economic downturn and the added unrest caused by the recent terrorist

landing the associate in 2001

one firm's approach

To put my law firm recruitment thoughts into perspective, I have for quite some time chaired Snell & Wilmer's Hiring Committee. Having been with the firm for 23 years, I have seen it grow from a one-office firm of 42 attorneys to a multi-office firm of roughly 365 attorneys. The principal purpose of the committee is to seek out and recruit entry-level attorneys for Snell & Wilmer's six offices (Phoenix, Tucson, Irvine, Salt Lake City, Denver and Las Vegas).

Like most large law firms, Snell & Wilmer runs a 12-week summer intern program in which second-year law students (and a sprinkling of first-year law students) participate. The majority of the firm's entry-level associates are hired out of the summer program.

To fill a summer intern class, the firm interviews law students at approximately 24 law schools (including Arizona State University and University of Arizona) and job fairs throughout the country. The committee also interviews law students who travel to Phoenix on their own nickel for interviews with Phoenix firms.

In any given fall, we generally receive resumes from well over 1,000 law students. We conduct personal interviews with approximately 450 students. We then "call back" roughly 10 percent of those students for further interviews in one of our six offices. About 70 percent of these call-back invitees are offered an opportunity to participate in the summer intern program. In the firm's Phoenix and Tucson offices, approximately 20 to 25 law students participate in the summer program in any given year.

—Joel Hoxie

attacks, Phoenix and Tucson may again see a rise in popularity. Because our summer 2002 class will not be identified until early December, however, we are uncertain how things will turn out. Certain committee members share the view that in tougher times (both economic and civil uncertainty), many law students will be less likely to "roll the dice" and

will instead stay close to family when choosing a law firm. That sentiment would clearly work to our disfavor because, like most of our competitors in town, many of the students whom we target attend out-of-state law schools and have few, if any, Arizona ties.

One thing different about recruitment in 2001 is that law students today have much greater access to information about law firms than did their counter-

parts years ago.

First of all, virtually every large firm now maintains a sophisticated Web site that contains substantial information about the firm's practice and its attorneys. The law students I interview these days know a lot more about the firm—and me. That didn't used to be the case.

Law students also routinely access Internet sites such as www.vault.com and the "greedy associates" site available at www.infirmation.com to obtain law firm information (however unreliable it may be). Moreover, there has been an increased focus in print journalism on the legal profession and law students in particular. For example, the *American Lawyer*, which has been available to law students for years, now publishes *L*, a magazine that is targeted to law students.

Has law student access to all this additional information affected the way law students select law firms? It's hard to say. Despite all the new sources of information, the large majority of the law students we encounter still select a firm on the basis of one simple factor—their "gut feel" of the place based on what they see and who they meet during the recruiting process.

With all the gloomy economic news, many attorneys in the firm assume that the task of the Hiring Committee has become a lot easier, and that finding the legal talent we need to secure our future should be like shooting fish in a barrel. I wish that were the case, but it isn't. ▀

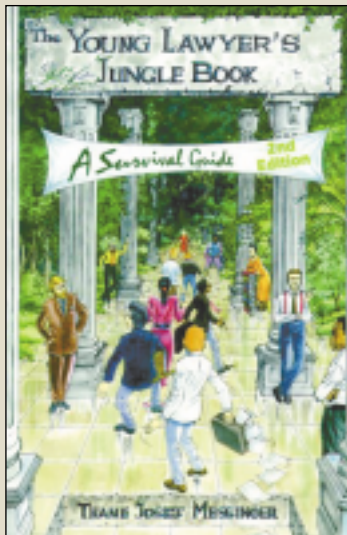
Joel Hoxie is a partner at Snell & Wilmer in Phoenix and is the chair of the firm's Hiring Committee.

the practitioner's toolbox

career and job-search titles

**The Young Lawyer's Jungle Book:
A Survival Guide (2nd ed.)**
by Thane Josef Messinger
Niche Press, 2000
256 pages, \$18.95 (paper)
ISBN 1-88-896001-9

Available at www.hits.net/~fpp
This survival guide and career manual covers more than 100 topics, and it is filled with commonsense advice told in a humorous, readable way.



How To Get the Job You Want in a Law Firm

by Ann Turnicky
John Wiley & Sons, 1997
240 pages, \$14.95
ISBN 0-47-115742-2

Available at www.wiley.com
The author, a legal recruiter, includes sections for job searchers who are law students, new attorneys and established lawyers. Among other things, she discusses interview strategies and making a lateral move.

What Can You Do With a Law Degree? (4th ed.)

by Deborah Arron
Niche Press, 1999
\$29.95 (paper)
ISBN 0-94-067546-3

Available at amazon.com
The author covers topics such as career assessment and career change. The book helps those who seek to use their law degrees in other fields or who decide to continue in practice but to change direction.

Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams

by Kimm Alayne Walton
Harcourt Brace Legal & Professional Publications, 1997
556 pages, \$17.46 (paper)
ISBN 0-15-900317-2

Available at amazon.com
Job searches can be frightening and overwhelming, and this book seeks to demystify the entire process. Written by a national columnist, the book makes a concerted effort to focus on the job interview and recommends methods to achieve success.

Also by the same author:

America's Greatest Places To Work With a Law Degree

National Book Network, 1998
1,146 pages, \$24.95 (paper)
ISBN 0-15-900180-3

Available at www.nbnbooks.com
This book describes hundreds of extraordinary places to work, whether in law firms, government agencies, corporations and more. A resource for jobs you otherwise might not have considered.

The Best of the Job Goddess (4th ed.)

Harcourt Brace Legal & Professional Publications, 1999
184 pages, \$11.96 (paper)
ISBN 0-15-900393-8

Available at amazon.com
This is a compilation of the author's popular job search column. It is targeted at recent law school graduates and law students.