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Young Lawyer Corner with Georgee Thevervelil

Hello South Jersey! I am the newest corporate associate at Flaster Greenberg PC, based mostly out of our Cherry Hill office while spending the remainder in Philadelphia. I recently lateralled over to Flaster from the Philadelphia office of a large international firm working in their finance and real estate group. As we are in the first-quarter and many young attorneys are already in the process of, or at least thinking about, switching firms, I wanted to use this column to describe some reasons to consider a transfer to a mid-sized firm and my experiences thus far.

When I first took the Pennsylvania and New Jersey bar examinations in 2011, I did not expect that I would actually need to be admitted into the New Jersey Bar for my transactional practice. With a job offer in hand going into the Pennsylvania bar exam, I figured the New Jersey bar exam was just an extra day of misery with hopefully some intangible benefits. Looking back six years later, I'm glad I did since it kept the door open for my current opportunity.

Greater Control of Future

As an associate in a large firm servicing large international clients, I had limited control over my future. Deal flow depended on market demand, which we all know is cyclical. Thus, associates had to quickly adapt to the feast or famine model. Firm clients tended to be institutional and the lynchpin of the relationship was usually a relatively senior equity partner. It was difficult for income partners, let alone associates, to be the crux of a client relationship. Other than being responsive and providing good work product, it was challenging for associates to create and develop relationships with clients.

On the other hand, associates at Flaster are encouraged by shareholders to develop clients through an associate origination bonus program. Without my former non-market billing rates discouraging marketing prospects, I can now use networking as a business generation tool. Although I am not a shareholder, I do feel like a legitimate stakeholder in the firm. I am a part of our nationally respected Crowdfunding practice group, and the firm has incorporated associates as an essential component of the efforts to further expand the practice.



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Broader Experiences

In my prior firm, I was largely limited to handling real estate finance matters for institutional clients. Now at Flaster, my client base has grown to be more diverse, while my transaction experience has become significantly broader. In a typical day, I could be drafting an operating agreement for a newly created company, crafting offering documents for a private placement, or attending a real estate closing.

Moving from a large firm to a smaller one does not mean that you're not doing complex and engaging work. Although transaction values may no longer be measured in the billions, my involvement on complex multi-million dollar deals has grown deeper with my move. These efforts to be involved in all parts of the transaction are already paying off. While I had a good amount of drafting experience, I was able to improve both my negotiation skills and my ability to lead calls since I developed a more hands-on role.

Greater Client Exposure

I was fortunate to have regular interaction with business side client contacts on our transactions at my prior firm. However, my interactions were usually limited to lower-level and mid-level individuals on our client's deal team. Associates communicating directly with managing directors, C-Suite executives or the general counsel was uncommon. Now, I have significant interactions with our clients and provide counsel on not just legal issues, but I provide input on business side considerations as well. Despite my three months at Flaster, I have had the privilege of working with founders, CEOs, majority owners and upper management on a regular basis on a variety of transactions.

Better Work/Life Balance

In any firm, regardless of size, the needs of clients are paramount and the billable hour, for now, still reigns supreme. However outside of "BigLaw" and other large law firms, it's easier to maintain a balance between client commitments and your personal life. With a working professional wife and two young children, this balance had become a priority for my family. Although I may have to work late to meet a deadline or close a deal, canceling or shortening vacations or regularly burning the midnight oil is unheard of at my current employer.

As with every change, there's always going to be pros and cons, and the decision will eventually depend on individual circumstances. In my situation, the benefits of moving to Flaster greatly outweighed the cons, and three months in, I'm very content with my decision. If you have any questions about my experiences or exploring a similar move, please feel free to reach out directly. In the meantime, I hope to meet everyone at upcoming events hosted by the Camden County Bar Association and the Young Lawyer Committee.