



COACHING INSIGHTS REPORT

TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS
IN THE US LEGAL INDUSTRY

2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coaching
Consulting
Outplacement
Training
Volta Coach Training

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

The two big questions we set out to answer were:

What if anything has changed since our first coaching insights survey in 2018?

What are the latest trends and developments in law firm coaching?

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

First, let's acknowledge the backdrop of the pandemic and its impact on coaching in law firms. The use of coaching across a wide range of areas had continued to expand in 2018 and 2019. Then, in March 2020, as social distancing and lockdown measures were widely implemented in response to the pandemic, we saw a dramatic reduction in the demand for external coaching services in the space of leadership and executive coaching. Career-related coaching, however, saw a resurgence as a result of the involuntary attrition fueled by the pandemic.

As firms began to acclimatize to the changed environment and as the impacts of remote working and working from home started to play out, coaching began its comeback. In addition, we saw ongoing growth in the number of PD and other business services professionals pursuing formal ICF-accredited coach training and obtaining ICF credentials.

In the last couple of years, we have seen more firms proactively add career coaching and advice to their talent management approaches to better manage their associate pipelines—and support alumni—and align them with opportunities for firm growth as well as individual advancement and promotion. In 2018, we observed:

“Coaching is not simply an individual professional development tool. It has the ability to support transformative programs and initiatives in law firms at an organizational level. For example, if a firm wants to move away from a traditional command and control leadership structure to a flatter, people-centered structure where more leadership is distributed among the partners and senior administrators, then it will need more leaders. Coaching can help the firm develop those leaders both in terms of their own approach/skillset and how they support and lead their people. For firms looking to optimize their performance, coaching can help drive the necessary cultural shifts by changing mindsets and behaviors throughout the organization.”

That remains true today. And clearly, many law firms agree:



KEY FINDING

58% of participating firms have more internal coaches today than they did in 2018.

Key Themes Of 2020



KEY FINDING

Organizational issues, well-being and stress management took center stage in many coaching conversations with lawyers in these groups.



CASE STUDY

ThompsonKnight

As the global COVID crisis unfolded over the course of 2020, Thompson & Knight recognized the need to provide additional support to their working parents. First, the firm created a working parents affinity group to provide opportunities for their lawyers to connect and share their experiences in real time. Next, the firm hired Volta to present to the group regarding time and stress management, effective communication and creating boundaries in light of the new normal of working from home. As uncertainty around the pandemic's impact on work and clients continued to rise, especially for junior partners, who felt particularly vulnerable professionally, the firm partnered with Volta to offer coaching as well. The result? Working parents, both men and women, "felt appreciated and seen by the firm." They were able to create and build relationships with one another, process their anxieties, tackle their unique challenges with a professional coach and, ultimately, give themselves much needed grace during a turbulent time.

Law firms continue to develop and establish coaching cultures. With more trained and certified coaches on their teams, the distinction between coaching and mentoring is better understood, although, in practice, the word "coaching" still covers a broad range of, typically one-on-one, conversations.

In our survey, we asked that respondents focus on coaching as "an active, creative partnership in which a coach asks thought-provoking questions to help an individual think through a situation, come up with options for action and choose which option they want to take." We contrasted it with mentoring and described it as "a non-directive discipline."



28% of participating firms see themselves as having already created coaching cultures.



KEY FINDING

While the focus of coaching remains one-on-one conversations, we have seen an increase in group coaching consistent with the trends that emerged in our 2018 report. Team coaching is also growing (see Coaching Formats for definitions).

We were surprised to find that 28% of participating firms see themselves as having already created coaching cultures. Clearly, there is potential for interpretation as to what a coaching culture is, but this statistic signals a resounding endorsement of coaching and the role it plays in some firms.

The application of coaching to a wide range of contexts and scenarios has blossomed. Whereas within recent years, coaching was seen as a corrective intervention, it is now better understood and has developed as an alternative to mentoring and training in the context of skills development and enhancement. The shift away from using coaching only to address specific problems or skills deficits and toward supporting leadership is consistent with experiences reported in the corporate sector.

Inevitably, virtual coaching increased in response to the protective measures implemented because of COVID. More surprisingly, the anticipated focus on coaching in support of DEI initiatives was slower to develop, notwithstanding the intense focus on social justice and racial equity issues in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder.

In our 2018 report we anticipated the rapid development of advanced technologies (collectively, artificial intelligence). While there have been various new entrants to the platform-based and app-based markets in the last couple of years, firms have not reported a significant use of apps to address coaching and career development needs. Human coaches remain the norm. That said, this is a space that will continue to evolve, and we will continue to monitor it.

Survey And Research Highlights

Based on our survey and research among our clients, we confirmed that no fewer than 76 (38%) of the Am Law 200 firms (ranked by revenue) use executive coaching (as opposed to mentoring). All indications are that this figure is actually much higher.¹



Of survey respondents that use coaching for their lawyers, nearly three-quarters (72%) see coaching as “extremely effective” or “very effective” in achieving individual goals. This is up from 63% in our last survey.

The big story of this survey was the growth in the internal coaching faculty within law firms.



KEY FINDING

Our independent research identified over 135 internal coaches, i.e., certified coaches or individuals who are specifically responsible for coaching, across nearly 80 firms.

It is no surprise therefore that over two-thirds (67%) of our respondents have one or more internal coaches. What is surprising is the rate of change in the last two plus years. In 2018, only 39% of firms had one or more internal coaches.

While it is still true that the majority of those who coach internally do so in combination with other responsibilities, primarily PD and talent management, we found that more firms are now reporting having internal coaches whose time is devoted primarily to coaching. Nonetheless, the vast majority of firms that use coaching still do so through a combination of internal and external coaches. Fewer than 1 in 20 firms use only internal coaching. The dynamic continues whereby internal coaches' efforts are generally focused more on associates and counsel than partners, with more partner coaching being provided by external coaches.



Very few firms that participated in the survey reported not using and not intending to adopt coaching. We recognize that survey respondents are more likely to be firms that already use coaching or have an interest in doing so.

Reasons given for not using coaching include:



Coaching Trends

We were curious to understand which of the trends identified by our 2018 survey respondents materialized over the last couple of years. We found:

- Increased awareness of the potential benefit and value of coaching as a tool with a shift away from the mindset that coaching is only corrective or remedial
- Increased budget devoted to coaching
- Increased use of coaching
- Increased numbers of internal coaches
- Increased BD, group and team coaching
- Two trends that did not develop the way our respondents anticipated were:
 - o Increased focus on measuring effectiveness and ROI
 - o Increased peer coaching

When we asked our 2020/21 survey respondents what trends they saw emerging, they identified two principal themes:



KEY FINDING

Continued growth in acceptance and use of coaching and its related democratization (by making it available more broadly).
Continued growth in internal coaching capabilities.

We would not bet against either of these predictions. Other popular suggestions were that we would see increased focus and growth in the following areas and contexts:

<p>Well-being.</p> <p>More coaching to drive DEI efforts and support the development and advancement of diverse attorneys.</p>	<p>Increased career management.</p> <p>More group coaching.</p>	<p>Greater tie-in of coaching with training programs.</p> <p>Greater expectations on evaluating effectiveness.</p>
<p>Remote/flexible working.</p> <p>Leadership.</p> <p>Work/life integration and parenting.</p> <p>Health/wealth and retirement planning.</p>	<p>More partner use of coaching skills.</p> <p>Continuing emphasis on BD.</p>	<p>Coaching will be built into individual professional development plans.</p> <p>More coaching for business services.</p> <p>Expansion to offices outside the U.S.</p>

Our Predictions

None of our own 2018 predictions were fully realized, except one—an increase in the use of virtual/remote coaching (by phone or video calls). COVID ensured that, as law firms took protective measures and remote work and working from home became the norm, remote and virtual coaching became the default. We predict that it will continue to be widely used even after the anticipated normalization of working environments later this year and early next.

Our other 2018 predictions—perhaps because of the disruption of COVID—are all still works-in-progress. We see movement towards them, but we are not fully there yet with most of them. We continue to anticipate:

1. Increased expectations and demand for coaching from partners and associates.
2. Expansion of coaching across different levels within law firms and across both the legal and business services functions.
3. Increased focus on coaching for high-potential employees.
4. Increased clarity as to the roles of internal coaches and their scopes of work.
5. Increased monitoring of and accountability required from internal and external coaches.
6. Increased focus on measuring and monitoring the effectiveness and ROI of coaching.
7. Increased use of coaching to further develop collaboration and teamwork.
8. Increased use of 360 feedback and other assessments.
9. Increased sophistication of coaching apps and AI-based coaching tools being developed by commercial third-party providers.
10. Increased adoption of coaching apps and AI-based coaching tools as a supplement to in-person coaching.
11. Expansion of career coaching to law firms' alumni networks.

To that list, we are adding these 2021 predictions:

1. More developed and more sustained coaching cultures.
2. An increased focus on “leader as coach.”
3. Team coaching. With an increased interest in collaboration, we see the ICF's introduction of its new team coaching competencies not as a coincidence but as a reflection of the continuing growth in the number of coaches both internally and externally.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the pandemic, it seemed as if all the progress in law firm coaching might be set back significantly. However, the economic resilience and success of law firms during the pandemic, combined with the versatility of coaching as a tool and its ability to address highly individualized challenges, led to coaching bouncing back far sooner than we anticipated. We are excited to report that coaching in law firms is as relevant and strong now as it ever has been.

Nicholas Jelfs-Jelf, June 2021

Volta Talent Strategies | CEO

646.203.7336 | nicholas.jelf@voltagepeople.com