

Executive summary

Lawyers are *passionate* professionals. Most embark on their career odyssey to achieve twin ambitions: professional success and the opportunity to serve as torchbearers of justice. Unfortunately, these champions of justice face much discontent and injustice in the workplace.

According to *The American Lawyer*, mid-level lawyers' morale plummeted to an all-time low last year as a result of instability, disloyalty, and massive layoffs at large firms. An unimaginably large proportion of mid-level and junior and non-equity partners express extreme dissatisfaction and helplessness with work life. Many lawyers are disillusioned by the prospect of facing inevitable career plateaus as opposed to equity partnership positions they had so fondly hoped (and strived) to achieve. Worse still, a large number of lawyers are quitting.

While at the surface-level, it would be easy to blame unfavorable economic conditions and other variables, the truth is that large law firms are Machiavellian mazes that are carefully structured to benefit elite partners at the expense of labor produced by many mid-level associates and junior and non-equity partners. Is it any surprise the ratio of partners to associates is termed *leverage*? What was once a profession, it appears, has become a business and the quest for justice, apparently, has become the chase for billable hours.

Individuals aren't as much to blame, as much as the system itself. Law school curriculum and firm-sponsored training programs foster lawyering skills, not client and business development acumen. While lawyers excel at arguing and presenting cases, they are not trained to maneuver the system to their advantage. **Is it any wonder, even the *crème de la crème* of the legal profession, never make it to the level of top-ranked equity partners.**

How could they?

The system is carefully designed and zealously guarded so that shrewd entrepreneurship and concealed formulae, not legal prowess, determine associate progression to higher ranks. The problem is pervasive and yet very few attempt to think outside the box to find solutions. It is about time the individual lawyer takes charge to overpower the system before the system defeats the individual.

There is definitely a missing dimension which holds the key to solutions for the crisis that is so skillfully masked. *The Death of the American Lawyer* report analyzes the legal industry's prevalent dynamics and also builds a foundation for creative, yet pragmatic, solutions.