

Definitely Mabey

What do a dry-stacked stone wall and a successful law firm have in common?

Try building a dry-stacked stone wall and you will find:

- Stones with similar edges create a better fit, are supportive of those above and below, and generally make the work proceed faster.



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- Stones can sometimes be reshaped to fit in the wall but when doing so you have to be very careful so that you successfully shape the stone without shattering it.
- In terms of the quality of the stones, how similar in colour they are to each other matters the least and in fact diversity of colour enhances the look of the wall.
- The stones need to be consistent in the integrity of their structure. As a result, some good-looking stones need to be discarded because they are not a good fit.
- It takes a lot of effort to lug the bigger base stones but just as much, if not more, effort goes into constantly trying to fit the smaller stones into the right spots because in the final analysis, they are nature's natural adhesive which keeps the big stones from shifting.

- Finding the right stones is an important and continual challenge.
- While building the wall, you need to constantly step back and assess it overall. You need to visualize where it is going and determine if you have the stones to get you there.
- A well-constructed and well-maintained dry-stacked stone wall will last for generations to come. It will hold up against changes in the environment and new owners.

Now that you know how to successfully build a dry-stacked stone wall, I will leave it to your imagination to draw the comparisons to building a law firm. But vision and commitment to the integrity of what it is you are building are the only prerequisites to successfully completing both tasks.

Over the coming weeks and months, and perhaps even years, there will be a sizeable pool of lawyers looking to land with firms. Their availability may be the result of a simple numbers game at their former firms and through no fault of their own. But let's give some credit to these larger firms for having some quotient of management intelligence and ask yourself what is the probability of their having turned a high-end "rainmaker" loose inadvertently? So firms should pay considerable attention to the fourth point to building a dry-stacked stone wall when considering a potential lateral hire.

And more so than ever, beware of folks bearing gifts as, if the candidate sounds too good to be true, likely you are right and the only real winner is the one collecting the commission.

Theoretically speaking only, of course, but if I had decided there was a strategic reason to raise the level of the wall, I would first look in similar areas to where I had found the stones I was most happiest with in my current wall. By focusing on known areas you are more likely to find better fitting stones and expend less energy (and money) in the process.

In any economy, and particularly the current one, the presence of entrepreneurial spirit in any lateral hire is paramount. Because it is at risk of becoming an overworked phrase, I define "entrepreneurial spirit" as the ability to both recognize opportunity and the know-how to figure out the best way to capitalize on it.

I intend to have some fun and I hope you do too with this practice management column over the coming months as we explore some new and some not-so-new concepts for building a successful law firm.

Because we recognize in the quaint fishing village I reside in on the east coast that no one, particularly me, has the market cornered on smarts, I intend to draw upon a variety of people for ideas and concepts to fuel this column. And for those faint of heart please be advised that they won't all be from within the guild!

Until the next column, remember

"Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted!"

Comments or Questions?

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