

Implementing Change: A Law Firm Looks at the New Part V Timing Guidelines

by Bonnie Hurry

Change is good, right? Change can also be hard. The 45-day rolling offer provision of the recently adopted Timing Guidelines is a *big* change. Thinking through the implications in each of our offices will occupy a lot of time for a lot of NALPers over the next few months.

The Part V Task Force, under the wise and patient leadership of Tom Schoenherr and after considerable member outreach and input, has proposed a significant change to NALP's Principles and Standards. NALP's Board of Directors recently adopted these changes on a trial basis for a one-year period, after which they will be put to a final vote by the membership in 2009. The one-year provisional implementation starts ... now!

Change is invigorating. And intimidating.

Law school and employer members have long struggled to ensure that NALP's Timing Guidelines are workable, fair, and appropriate in an ever-changing market. Over the years, changes have been made several times, and even small changes (moving from December 15 to December 1 for instance) have initially been hard on the membership. And yet, in the end these changes have proved to be manageable.

Now we face the challenge of implementing an even bigger change, and one that many of us believe will offer law students a more realistic view of the marketplace. What is required now is for each of us to think about how best to **educate**, **implement**, and **evaluate**.

Education about the new guidelines has to involve our hiring partners, recruiting committees, inter-

viewers (lawyers), and recruiting colleagues, all of whom will be directly affected by the change, and all of whom are likely to need regular reminders about the new Timing Guidelines in the year ahead.

At my firm, our education process started with self-help. We started the conversation in a comfortable and relatively small environment. The firm's recruiting department set time aside to meet about the proposed change. Tom Schoenherr's introductory memo and the discussion paper were distributed to the department in advance of the meeting. The goal for our firmwide department meeting was for everyone to share their questions, concerns, and views. The exchange of information was lively and quickly shifted from a Q&A meeting to an energizing brainstorming session about how to make best use of the changes.

Shortly after our department meeting, we shared the information with our hiring partners/recruiting committee. Their questions and suggestions challenged us to think still more about how to tinker with our program. The next conversation happened at the Personnel Committee meeting. And as with so many recruiting related topics, the lawyers were eager to hear about the change and interested in offering their views on how to best move ahead.

While the dialogue about the new 45-day rule continues, we, as a department, are now starting to think about the implementation at a granular level. Each of us has been challenged to step back from the constant buzz of activity and think through the recruiting process in detail. And thinking about it at the implementation level has provided an al-

most endless stream of questions for us to answer. For instance, how will we track the 45-day offer acceptance period for different offers made on different days? How does the language in our offer letter need to change to reflect the new guidelines and at the same time to assure students that we will consider extensions? What should the sequence of follow-up efforts look like, and when should they begin? What happens at the end of 45 days if we have not heard back from a student? How will we tinker with which reports? Will our yields change — from OCI to callback, from callback to offer, and then from offer to acceptance? And, if they do, how do we use that new information?

And beyond the basics of implementation, there are the strategic questions to consider. How can we take advantage of the new Timing Guidelines to ensure that we improve our overall recruiting outcomes? How can we use this change to improve our overall process?

It will be a year of testing new policies, new procedures, and new strategies. We will surely get some things right and other things wrong. And at this time next year, we will be evaluating the success of all of our efforts. At my law firm, we will be assessing how the new Part V rules worked for us, how the adaptations we made to our procedures and strategies either worked or didn't, and what we can do to further enhance our law student recruiting for the coming year. At the same time, the NALP community as a whole will be assessing how well the new Part V Timing Guidelines worked across the industry and will be deciding whether or not to make these provisional guidelines permanent.

And this is just the beginning. Because change is also constant.

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