

Kramer Levin Talent Officer On Successful Summer Programs

By **Kevin Penton**

Law360 (June 7, 2023, 3:17 PM EDT) -- Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP tries to tweak its summer program each year to make it better, but also knows what works best and should be left alone, said Lauren Tapper, the firm's chief legal talent officer.

New for 2023 are more tailored in-person events that the firm hopes will be meaningful for its summer associates, as opposed to larger events where individual participants might get lost in the crowd, Tapper said.

But Kramer Levin is retaining the hybrid format it used last year, recognizing that mirroring the work schedule that its own attorneys and staff follow is the best approach, Tapper said. The class size is also remaining at 18, a figure that the firm believes is an optimal fit to ensure that participants get the support they need from senior attorneys and that allows Kramer Levin to get a better look at who it hopes will compose the future of the firm, she said.

Tapper spoke recently with Law360 Pulse about Kramer Levin's approach to its summer program and how it is making it work during the challenging economic climate for the legal industry.

The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

How does Kramer Levin learn from the past when it comes to its summer program? What changes did the firm implement for this year?

Each year we survey our summers, we do an evaluation to see what's going well and what we may want to change. What we're doing this year is we're having more targeted events, focused on making them more intimate and department-specific. So they're having an opportunity to really connect with the attorneys in a particular practice. It's been a more manageable structure for them to interact and network.

How is the program being structured this year, in terms of being in the office versus following more of a hybrid structure?

Our summer program has the same format as our attorneys, which is that the majority of the work week is to be in the office. That is for full-time attorneys and staffers, to be in the office three days a week. So we're making sure that if we're having a presentation or an event, they are encouraged to be in.

We do try to make sure that we have two days in which we have a hybrid option where they can be in a remote location or they can come into the office. Our attorneys are engaging very well in having the opportunity to meet with them when they are in person and making the most of those shadowing opportunities that are available.

Given that the summertime is a time of year when a lot of attorneys and staff may be away on vacation and work may slow down compared to other times of the year, how challenging is it to navigate those schedules when running a summer program?

I honestly don't think that summer at this particular time is really an issue from a vacation perspective. I do think that as a general rule, it's usually August when people tend to take more time off and things become slower. But our attorneys are very thoughtful and intentional. Either the assignments, the work or the projects are available, and they cohesively work together so that if they're not available, someone is covering for them and the interactions are maintained.

When Law360 recently completed a survey with incoming summer associates, the biggest concern they expressed was whether they would ultimately be hired by their firms. How challenging is it to operate a summer program with the current economic climate for the legal industry?

We do have a smaller summer program. Our program is our foundation to build our pipeline, as things progress and there is natural attrition in the law firm. So not being a very large program, it's not something that we're concerned about in terms of having people to manage and worrying about how we'll have all these people coming back. It's a very manageable group and number, and we plan for that. At this juncture, we expect to have the same size program next year.

I understand that this year's program is composed of 67% women and 39% of what the firm calls underrepresented populations. Tell me more about what Kramer Levin did to ensure that the summer program is as diverse as it is.

Our summer program is committed to [diversity, equity and inclusion.] We are committed to ensuring that when we are bringing in our pipeline of students, that we are representative of the different populations. It is very important to us to take that into consideration during our recruitment process.

As most law firms are doing, we're definitely doing a lot more presentations to 1L students, making sure our law firm is present at all the different opportunities. A majority of the schools have diversity fairs that you're able to participate in, to do a lot of work with the student affinity groups. We really actively work to make sure people know who we are and what makes Kramer Levin special and unique.

--Editing by Alex Hubbard.