

THE AMERICAN LAWYER

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OCTOBER 2003



THE 2003 MIDDLELEVEL ASSOCIATES SURVEY

THE BEST PLACES TO WORK

2003 Rank	2002 Rank	Firm, Location	Overall Score	2003 Rank	2002 Rank	Firm, Location	Overall Score
1	28	Bracewell & Patterson, <i>Houston</i>	4.453	6	5	Carlton Fields, <i>Tampa</i>	4.224
2	—	Varnum, Riddering, <i>Grand Rapids</i>	4.356	7	13	Robins, Kaplan, <i>Minneapolis</i>	4.201
3	1	Alston & Bird, <i>Atlanta</i>	4.334	8	62	Winston & Strawn, <i>Chicago</i>	4.182
4	2	Goulston & Storrs, <i>Boston</i>	4.258	9	3	Susman Godfrey, <i>Houston</i>	4.175
5	6	Faegre & Benson, <i>Minneapolis</i>	4.236	10	64	Miles & Stockbridge, <i>Baltimore</i>	4.167

RELATIVELY SPEAKING

Midsize Firms

Rank	Firm	Location	2003 Overall Score	Rank	Firm	Location	2003 Overall Score
1	Varnum, Riddering	Grand Rapids	4.356	6	Balch & Bingham	Birmingham	3.558
2	Goulston & Storrs	Boston	4.258	7	Holme Roberts	Denver	3.532
3	Susman Godfrey	Houston	4.175	8	Lewis and Roca	Phoenix	3.517
4	Miles & Stockbridge	Baltimore	4.167	9	Arnall Golden	Atlanta	3.470
5	Munsch Hardt	Dallas	3.592	10	Fitzpatrick, Cella	New York	3.161
Midsize Firms Average							3.779

RESULTS BY CITY

Maryland Baltimore	CITY AVERAGE:	Score for office/city	Rank in city	Respondents	Interesting work	Satisfying work	Benefits and compensation	Associate relations	Partner relations	Training and guidance	Management openness	Communication re: partnership	Attitude toward pro bono	Billable hours	Expect to stay two years	Overall workplace rating
Miles & Stockbridge		1	4.167	10	4.30	4.10	3.70	4.70	4.30	4.10	4.10	4.20	4.10	3.80	4.10	4.50
Piper Rudnick		4	3.534	8	4.13	4.00	4.13	3.50	3.38	3.63	3.00	2.50	2.88	3.38	4.13	3.75
Saul Ewing		3	3.567	5	4.20	4.00	3.80	4.40	4.00	3.40	2.80	2.80	3.20	2.20	3.80	4.20
Whiteford, Taylor		2	3.612	6	3.67	3.33	3.17	4.00	4.00	3.17	3.17	2.67	4.00	4.33	3.83	4.00

THE SECRETS TO THEIR SUCCESS

Solid partner-associate relations pay off for firms at the top of this year's midlevel survey.

By Matt Fleischer-Black

HERE WAS A BIG-LEAGUE challenge for an associate, or any lawyer: Beat the legal team of All-Star professional basketball player Kobe Bryant. A consortium of news organizations wanted access to the police records of Bryant's arrest for sexual assault in Eagle, Colorado. Christopher Beall, a sixth-year Faegre & Benson associate, not only drafted the organizations' request to unseal the documents, he argued the case to the judge. CNN's cameras were rolling the entire time.

Beall didn't succeed: In late August the judge denied the news organizations' request. But Beall's wide exposure reminded other associates why they find Minneapolis-based Faegre—number five on this year's midlevel survey—so satisfying. It wasn't just that the partners gave Beall hefty responsibility, it was their willingness to give the associate public credit. "Here's this case that everyone's watching, and there's a two-hour-long hearing, and the associate is doing the talking. Not the partners—they're sitting there watching the associate," says Adam Scoville, a fourth-year associate in Faegre's Denver office.

All ten firms that ranked at the top of this year's midlevel survey scored highly in the category of partner-associate relations, and none ranked lower than twenty-first. Among the many aspects of associates' jobs that we asked about, this category stood out as crucial to associate satisfaction: Baruch College research and public affairs professor Gregg van Ryzin, who performed a regression analysis of our data, identified partner relations with associates as the variable most closely related to the overall ranking, even higher than confidence in the firm's leadership, satisfying work, and family-friendliness.

The goal may be clear, but the recipe for achieving it is not. Not all managing partners at firms with high scores say they focus on the specific issue of partner-associate relations. Meanwhile, pleased associates often can point only to the "culture" of their firms. For instance, harmony among the different castes of lawyers at sixth-ranked Carlton Fields just seems to be the nature

of the place, says Stacey Sutton, a fourth-year litigation associate at the Tampa firm. "In general, you just get along with the people," she says.

Getting along seems to start with listening. Associates at these leading firms repeatedly said that partners wanted to know what they thought about their firms. Associates at Faegre, for instance, meet once a month with the leaders of each office. At these gatherings, associates bring up issues with partners and hear updates on firm strategy. Not all of the meetings are formal. Several of the top ten firms hold regular social outings where associates are expected to be heard as well as seen.

After listening comes action, says James Neis, managing partner of Chicago's Winston & Strawn, the eighth-place finisher. "If you have a partner who is a jerk, that partner has to be given the message that [he is] a jerk," he says. He reports that during the past three years, "six or seven" partners have had their pay docked because of their poor treatment of subordinates.

Similarly, a hands-off standard does not suffice for John Frisch, chairman of Baltimore's Miles & Stockbridge; he expects regular expressions of equality. His firm insists that partners introduce an associate to opposing counsel and clients as a "colleague," rather than "my associate." That's more than lip service, says William Krulak, Jr., a third-year business litigation associate. "Associates don't feel like they're tracked and traced and followed to see if we're doing what we're supposed to be doing," says Krulak, who says he felt differently about two large Washington, D.C., firms where he worked as a summer associate.

Showcasing associates is another winning formula for associate relations. At Faegre, Scoville, the Denver fourth-year, will headline an intellectual property seminar that the firm is offering this fall. Even public speaking inside the firm helps associates feel invested in its future, says Ben Johnson III, managing partner of Atlanta's Alston & Bird, this year's third-place finisher. Once a month all of Alston's lawyers gather (via teleconference links to the other offices), and each meeting includes a handful of presentations about practice group achievements. Sometimes associates describe these highlights instead of partners, says Johnson.

Alston has ranked highly for years; last year it topped our survey. But three of this year's top ten—Miles & Stockbridge, Winston & Strawn, and Minneapolis's Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi—were in the bottom half just two years ago. Evidently, lawyers can mend their ways.

To improve, firm leaders ought to return to step one—listening, advises Neis of Winston & Strawn, which jumped from sixty-second place last year and 136th the year before. "We started off by going around and asking what is it we could do better," he says. Now, his firm is the only one based in Chicago, New York, Washington, D.C., or San Francisco to place in the top ten.

Progress takes time. Neis's listening tour began three years ago—a typical amount of time for adjustments by partners to pay off with associates. Robins, Kaplan and Miles & Stockbridge both say that they changed their program for associates around that time, too. These firms say that they are continuing to fine-tune their programs. As with all firms, they're just one class of associates away from the bad old days.

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