

RICK MORANIS VS THE SUPERHEROES: AKA WHAT'S WRONG WITH RIGHT SIZING?

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Cheaper. Faster. Leaner. Better? Not so fast. As law firms face increasing pressure to deliver services to clients in the most cost-effective manner, there is much discussion about the best way to “right size” their organizations. Right sizing (which, until recently, was better known as “downsizing”) has had major negative connotations among the workforce. It is perceived as extreme, sometimes irrational and always a morale killer. In other words, the bad guy. A more appropriate solution is to “right task” personnel in the firm.

Here's a simple way to understand the difference:

Right sizing is like Honey, I Shrunk the Kids! It's all about making the organization smaller. It doesn't discriminate between talent that the firm needs and those who are not contributing. It's about managing less, not managing better. Right sizing is not concerned with anything outside the “family.”

Right tasking is like Marvel's latest *Avengers* movie. It's all about building a core team with various skills necessary to keep things working smoothly. It also relies on talent outside the core group to be brought in when the situation calls for it. Right tasking is about assigning responsibilities for specific actions to those who are best equipped to carry them out.

Right sizing and right tasking both aim to reduce costs, but they do so in very different ways. One is like chopping down a tree to get more sunlight while the other is pruning the tree to allow for greater sunlight and ensure growth. Right sizing is numbers-driven. Right tasking is process-driven. Right sizing looks to reduce staff. Right tasking looks to correctly assign job functions to the most appropriate level within the organization capable of successfully complete the work. Right sizing attempts to achieve cost reductions quickly. Right tasking attempts to position the firm to more cost-effectively manage both current and future needs.

Need a few more reasons why right tasking is the better approach?

Aces In their Places: The firm retains the right mix of skills and knowledge to manage the work while driving down the overall cost of the operation. You are not over paying for work to be done. Attorneys should not be finalizing documents themselves; they should be performing knowledge work and building a book of business. Experienced legal assistants should not be making copies nor filing documents; they should be using their knowledge of clients and matters to prepare documents and manage workflow.

The firm is staffed to handle normal workflow needs and has solutions in place to manage peak needs. In a world that is quickly shifting to on-demand, just in time delivery and fixed or alternative fee arrangements, overstaffing inhibits you from being nimble. Determining which tasks are “mission critical” (i.e. highly sensitive, highly confidential or highly complex) and which can be more effectively handled via technology or outsourcing to third-party resources allow a firm to adapt to peaks and valleys in workflow.

The firm can grow as it takes on new work or clients by creating opportunities for internal staff to develop skills and assume greater responsibilities. Syncing staff development to future growth builds morale and helps a firm retain good people. A few seismic demographic shifts are in place, here: The combination of a

knowledgeable older workforce retiring in large numbers and technology taking on greater importance in the operation of a business will produce a natural reduction in force. Millennials will be critical to future growth. Given that this group values knowledge growth and feeling they are contributing to the success of an organization, it is essential that firms provide opportunities to meet those needs.

Done properly, firms can effectively reduce staff and drive down costs by right tasking rather than right sizing. The benefits of right tasking ensure that a law firm can manage workflow in the present while also being able to accommodate future growth.

Perhaps the Avengers said it best: *“There was an idea... to bring together a group of remarkable people... to see if we could become something more...so when they needed us, we could fight the battles that they never could”*.

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