

MONDAY, JULY 28, 2025

Recruitment

Regional foundations, global ambitions: A blueprint for California recruiting

Major companies, key industries, and a thriving startup ecosystem offer the state's legal professionals unmatched opportunities to handle high-profile matters, forge deep client relationships, and build globally impactful careers

By Aaron T. Chiu

A hub for major companies, key industries, and a vibrant startup ecosystem, California marks a prime destination for those seeking to build exciting legal careers. California-based companies, from startups to global titans, face significant legal challenges that require innovative solutions. The state presents unparalleled opportunities for legal professionals to engage in cutting-edge work with global implications.

Ambitious legal talent is drawn to firms that strategically embrace California's potential by investing in a robust presence in the state. I've witnessed this firsthand – our offices in San Francisco, Silicon Valley, Orange County, San Diego, and Los Angeles have attracted world-class lawyers at all stages of their careers. This decentralized approach with sizable offices beyond the East Coast positions us to seamlessly serve clients, regardless of their geographical location. Further, this approach allows attorneys to build their careers in a specific location while still encountering opportunities to make a global impact.

I have always had family in Toronto and California. During my college days, I wanted the best of both worlds and found that by working in the Bay Area offices of a global firm. My own legal journey began at USC Law School, followed by a clerkship in the 9th Circuit, and then practicing antitrust in Latham's Bay Area offices. Throughout my career, I've found the state offers the quintessential West Coast lifestyle without sacrificing the dynamism and sophistication of the East Coast business culture.



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Making a local home in a global firm

The success and appeal of firms in California for rising legal talent often stems from a decentralized management model, where global leaders establish a presence across various offices instead of concentrating authority in a single headquarters. A decentralized management model fosters seamless teamwork and innovation by leveraging a network of expertise, allowing attorneys to work on high-profile matters from any location. For lawyers working with tech clients, this model proves especially valuable, empowering them to offer collaborative counsel that adapts as clients evolve from startups to established enterprises.

As an antitrust lawyer, I've seen how this model plays out in practice. While key centers of antitrust law are typically located in New York, Washington, D.C., and Brussels, being based in the Bay Area has given me direct access to the heart of the tech sector. This proximity – especially to the Northern District of California, where many tech-related cases are heard – allows me to develop a deeper understanding of clients' businesses and their unique legal challenges. Engaging directly with clients fosters trust and helps me tailor legal strategies that align with their objectives, providing value that might not be possible from a distant office.

For associates looking to build global careers in California, ask questions about a firm's management model, proximity to power players, collaboration across offices and the criteria for progression within the firm. These represent more than abstract business questions; the answers will meaningfully impact your ability to work on headline-grabbing matters and build an expansive career.

For example, at Latham, associates in particular benefit from cross-staffing on matters that span multiple offices. From a progression perspective, our Associates Committee, comprised of roughly half associates and half partners, determines progression based on merit. Such collaboration ensures that associates feel integrated and valued, regardless of their location, dismantling the misconception that certain offices serve merely as support roles.

I can attest that California offers a unique blend of economic activity and quality of life, making it an ideal place for ambitious lawyers to build their careers.

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