

Solving Title Inflation

BY MIKE EVERS

I receive most of my assignments from chief legal officers seeking to add specific technical or industry experience to their departments. Due to the flat organizational structure of many in-house teams, these positions are frequently staff attorney roles.

The “staff attorney” title, however, sounds rather pedestrian and junior level. It can be a turn off to candidates with great credentials and 6 years or more of the right experience—the most common search request. Worse yet, your HR department may fight your desire to use a search firm to fill a staff attorney opening, leaving you at the mercy of Internet job sites if you refuse to wage a turf war. The irony, of course, is that these openings are the hardest to fill at the quality level you want.

One solution is a better title. CLOs cringe at this suggestion, as companies hate title inflation. I understand that you can't have a department in which everyone is your deputy general counsel.

However, you can eliminate stupid titles such as assistant counsel (sounds like a secretary). The title counsel is far more attractive than staff attorney, and also is more accurate if the new hire will have client contact. In a large department, titles such as associate general counsel should be reserved for those who manage other lawyers. In many departments, however, a handful of lawyers all report directly to the general counsel. By definition, they are assisting you, so consider using an AGC title more liberally.

You can redesign appropriate titles within existing pay grades. For the cost of printing new business cards, you can make a positive impact on your recruiting, and maybe even your retention.

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