

Winston & Strawn: Masters of the Team Lateral Hires

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The Lawyer has designated Winston & Strawn “Masters of the Team Lateral Hire” as a result of the firm’s recent record-setting growth. The magazine interviewed Chairman Tom Fitzgerald for a May 18 article that highlights Winston’s “transformational team hires.”

Described as “the U.S. firm that has emerged as the team hirer par excellence,” Winston brought on more lateral partners globally last year than any other firm of its size. Of the 90 hires made over the past 14 months, many came to Winston as part of a team, a result *The Lawyer* describes as “the real jackpot.” With lateral groups arriving from McDermott Will & Emery, Chadbourne & Parke, and Jenner & Block, Winston’s revenue and average profit per partner has jumped to new records.

To quickly grow and generate higher revenues, according to Tom, firm leadership concentrated on clients, practices, and sectors. “We sharpened our focus...for example, in private equity we’ve hired tax lawyers to help structure deals, while we’ve also done a lot to beef up our borrower-side finance practice,” he explained. “You’ve got to be able to negotiate a deal, structure a deal, and finance a deal.”

Overseeing integration is Chief Development Officer Melissa Ertek, who leads Winston’s lateral partner program and delivers on the firm’s commitment to aggressively pursue only the best people. Based on Winston leadership’s strategically defined priorities for practice development in locations with a compelling need for legal services, Melissa has been instrumental in securing a string of team acquisitions for the firm.

In February 2017, Winston entered the Dallas market with 60 lawyers from nine firms. Tom had interviewed most of the candidates, then organized a dinner for the practice groups heads. “This dinner,” the article notes, “has taken on mythical status in local legal market circles. Fitzgerald engineered it so that the leaders of an unprecedented number of firms [were present], including Tom Melsheimer...and Bryan Goolsby...”

These senior lawyers were previously unaware of Tom’s “grand plans for launching in Dallas off the back of an audacious, multiple-firm team-hire,” according to the article. But, Tom explains: “Because nearly all of them were used to leading offices, we thought there wouldn’t be any cultural issues; we trusted that mutual respect would carry the day. And it did. It was a fun dinner.”

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