

White Paper: DRAFT V1

Alumni Induction Programmes

**for Partners Exiting Law Firms: delivering benefits to leavers
and firms alike; an alternative to so-called "outplacement"**

Ciarán Fenton, Founding Partner, Fenton & Co LLP

September 2011

The purpose of this paper is to promote a change in the management of leavers by using alumni programmes to create benefits for both leavers and firms alike.

At best, exit conversations and processes are currently as good as the highest levels of emotional intelligence of those involved. At worst, the process is traumatic for the leaver and damaging to the firm.

There is an opportunity to change this by reframing the relationship between the parties and by acknowledging that since all leavers, whether highly rated or not, form part of the collective intellectual property and network into which the firm has invested, then a higher return on that investment in the future can be achieved by retaining value through alumni induction programmes.

The first step is to reframe the relationships in a leaving context. Currently the relationship is often, although not always, framed in a “parent-child” mode¹, and I use these terms as Eric Berne intended and acknowledge that partners would not necessarily recognise themselves in these patterns. The stronger “parent” firm negotiates an exit with the weaker “child” leaver. Even with basic alumni programmes in place, neither the leaver nor the firm benefits from future activity. The firm’s reputation suffers with those remaining as well as with those who might join it.

The proposed reframing consists of a conversion of this “parent-child” dynamic to an “adult-adult” dynamic whereby the “macro-business” firm negotiates and works with the “micro-business” exiting partner. This merely reflects the reality. The partner has always been a professional services firm “on legs” and there is no difference between him/her and any business. So, if their legal careers are businesses then all the art and science of business can be applied to them. It also means that their relationship with the firm was one of joint venture partner or service provider and this changes the context of the exit.

¹ Eric Berne, Transactional Analysis

Provided the firm commits to a belief that all alumni are valuable - de facto, then this reframing enables the parties to convert the partnership relationship to an alumnus relationship, provided that the alumni programme is robust and meaningful. Otherwise the reframing will be derided as mere semantics.

When the firm demonstrates with real resources and with cases studies rather than asserting the value of alumni, then the exiting partner will value and want to be part of the give and take culture of the best alumni programmes.

Once the reframing process is complete, the firm can move to the second step which is to give each exiting partner an alumnus induction programme instead of so called "outplacement". Whilst there are exceptional providers this process receives very mixed press². The main complaint is that some providers increasingly offer standardised services, which

² For example August 20, 2009, Wall Street Journal, headlined "[Outplacement Firms Struggle to Do Job](#)";

some say offer little value. Few employers track whether outplacement works.

The advantage of replacing outplacement with alumnus induction is the extent to which a significant proportion of the spend can drive value to the firm which would normally have been lost through outplacement. The objective of the induction programme is to create a bespoke strategy for the exiting partner following an assessment of transferable skills and options including in-house, non-executive directorships, philanthropy, and business opportunities within a rich alumni programme context.

Whilst Alumni programmes are very advanced in academic environments they are in their infancy in businesses. This is because a short term out of sight, out of mind culture still dominates many business cultures despite growing evidence of the impact of disintermediation, social networks, virtual teams and the decline of the "social contract" between employers and employees.

Professional services firms are ideal contexts to develop strong alumni programmes. McKinsey for example has nearly 23,000 alumni whereby former consultants make and sustain professional relationships. They see this “dynamic network is a lasting benefit of a McKinsey career”³. Alumni are also provided with a restricted access portal.

This paper proposes an even more radical engagement with alumni. This would involve an investment of time, resources and the redirection of “outplacement” funding. Whilst the returns on first analysis may seem purely “soft” it is the contention of this paper that hard cash returns from new business and improved performance would quickly follow. The detailed processes required to maximise the probability of these outcomes will be detailed in a forthcoming paper.

© Ciarán Fenton 2011



***Management for Business Leaders
Strategy - Performance - Transition***

Fenton & Co LLP

33 St. James's Square, London SW1Y 4JS
t +44 (0) 207 754 0335 f +44 (0) 871 433 6145 w
<http://www.fentonllp.com>

³ <http://www.mckinsey.com/alumni.aspx>