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New Entrants, Remote Work Tilt South Florida Playing Field Toward Associates

Third to fifth-year associates are currently at a premium, according to one recruiter in the market.

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Law Firm Associates

Alexander Lugo

What You Need to Know

- A rush of firms and talent into South Florida is creating opportunities for associates.
- As some associates seek remote work, some view flexibility as a drawback and others as an opportunity.
- With Big Law continuing to move into the region, South Florida's market is becoming more nuanced.

South Florida's [ongoing talent squeeze](#)—caused by a plethora of firms moving in—seems to be driving a legal job market where sought-after associates can be slightly more picky with where they land roles.

The incoming rush of both law firms and lawyers means that there's more quality talent to choose from nowadays. However, the number of incoming firms, mixed in with rise of remote work, could prove to be a double-edged sword when it comes to landing that top talent.

Although partners with business to offer are always in demand, third to fifth-year associates are currently at a premium in South Florida, according to Joe Ankus, president of local recruiting firm Ankus Consulting.

Although Florida firms may generally be flooded with resumes on any given week, they're mostly careful who they choose out of the pile, said Benjamin Widlanski, a partner at Miami's Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton.

"We pass on most of the resumes we get just out of the gate," Widlanski said. "But at the top of the market, there's always a tight number of candidates. There aren't that many people that qualify as high-end top talent."

As firms fight for that top talent, associates may be set to benefit.

Remote Work

Both Ankus and Widlanski agree that remote work is partially to blame for one particular phenomenon they've seen partially contribute to the talent squeeze; lawyers moving into South Florida aren't necessarily taking jobs with firms stationed in the market.

"You have lawyers coming from Am Law firms decide they want to move to Florida. They get a job here, and then when they go to give notice, their firm says, 'You don't need to leave us. Just work from your terrace in Brickell.' I've seen this happen unfortunately too many times," he said. "The candidate gets their cake and eat it too."

This flexibility may come at a cost. While some firms may boast about their remote work flexibility publicly in order to attract lawyers who seek that flexibility, Ankus says that some partners may resent it privately.

And although firms may choose to be flexible depending on the candidate, both Ankus and Widlanski think remote work can also hurt these recruits in the future. While Ankus believes it strips young lawyers of crucial development, Widlanski thinks it can also lead to those lawyers not being considered for promotions down the line.

"Out of sight can often be out of mind," said Widlanski.

Conversely, some law firms view remote work as beneficial to both the firm and any lawyer that seeks the option.

Miami-based boutique Podhurst Orseck has been experimenting with remote work since before COVID-19 even existed, and one of its managing partners, Steven Marks, says it's just one of the tools it uses to net top talent.

As a result, the firm has been able to get lawyers on a temporary basis, which can be important if demand rises at any given moment, Marks said.

“These are people that are in transitions in their lives, whether they’re getting married or whether they’re having children or whether they had to be relocated and they still want to work. We could offer them tremendous flexibility,” he said.

And while South Florida may be attractive to some, the region ranks high in negatives like [traffic](#) and [inflation](#), making it a destination that’s not for everyone.

Podhurst is capitalizing by being a destination for people outside of the region who are seeking alternatives.

“One is a law student at Yale, and another is an NYU graduate who is travelling around the country in an RV,” he said. “It’s a win-win for both of us, so we’ve been trying to be creative because it is hard to find talent in a market that is exploding like Miami.”

Layers in the Market

While remote work helps firms like Podhurst stand out, so does rate structuring, according to Doug Horn, a managing director of local legal recruiting firm Palmer Kent Associates.

“These behemoth firms, they used to represent medium-sized businesses, small businesses. They’re not representing those businesses anymore. They’re representing large public companies,” Horn said. “These small to midsize firms, they’re happy to work with the small to midsize companies. And I think it’s actually creating more layers.”

The layers, or different cost levels, are helping smaller firms differentiate themselves from Big Law and its leading to more opportunities to recruit talent as well, according to Abbey Kaplan, founding member of Miami-based midsize firm Kluger, Kaplan, Silverman, Katzen & Levine.

“Our biggest challenge with the talent is not from the big firms that are coming into town. It’s from other firms like us,” Kaplan said.

Kaplan even argued that firms like his welcome Big Law because their presence allows midsize firms to offer more reasonable demands, which may be attractive to young lawyers seeking work-life balance. Although money is a motivator, it can only go so far to convince young lawyers about the value of being overworked, he said.

“If these firms come down here with that attitude and that culture,” he said. “That’s going to give firms like ours an opportunity that we’ve never had before.”

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