



A Wide Net

A broad approach yields diverse candidates for Assigned Counsel

When clients ask recruiters at Assigned Counsel for candidates with just a few years of experience, they are often surprised by the recruiters' response. "We try to get our clients to think outside the box," says Alisa M. Austin, a senior recruiting attorney with the Philadelphia-based legal staffing firm which places lawyers on a temporary basis with corporate law departments, law firms, nonprofits, and government agencies.

When clients consider excluding qualified – but more experienced – candidates, often out of fear that they won't be happy with the job, Austin says that Assigned Counsel's recruiters point out the many reasons these more senior candidates may want a temporary assignment. Some want a position with more flexibility and less pressure. Others may be sole practitioners who want to focus on doing the work instead of finding clients.

"We have been fairly successful at getting our clients to hire more senior-level people than they might expect to be a fit," she says.

This approach of looking broadly at potential hires and then encouraging clients to do the same has served Assigned Counsel well, both in satisfying clients and in bringing in a diverse set of contingent workers. And more and more, this diversity is a point of interest for the client base.

Increasing Client Interest

Robert J. Murphy Jr. started the business with classmates from college and law school in 1992.

Today, Murphy, who is African American, is the majority owner and president.



Robert J. Murphy Jr.

Assigned Counsel is certified as a Minority Business Enterprise, or MBE, with several affiliations including the National Minority Supplier Development Council. "It is often part of the access process for corporations seeking to know if you are a minority-owned business and, if so, to verify it through identification and certification," he says.

In the past, many clients seemed more focused on having a minority-owned business on their list of suppliers than on actually working with those businesses. But Murphy notes that mindset has changed recently. "There has been an attitude change on behalf of corporations to actively want to have participation by minority or diverse firms now," he explains.

Still, being certified as a minority-owned business is primarily a way to open doors and help a firm gain visibility with potential clients. "Then you have to prove that you can produce, and that has nothing to do with diversity status," Murphy says. "It has to do with the quality of your talent and meeting the needs of the client."

To meet those needs, Assigned Counsel casts a wide net for talent. Additionally, all recruiters on staff at Assigned Counsel have been practicing attorneys. This ensures they have a deep understanding of the credentials and experience that are relevant to a position and know how to gauge what type of candidate will fit a client's company culture.

Looking for Lawyers

When it comes to external talent, Assigned Counsel does not limit itself to traditional places to find lawyers. Recruiters

have developed large networks and resources for finding quality candidates.

"We are a blind screening organization, and we accept resumes from anyone who is licensed to practice in a jurisdiction," Murphy says. "We don't make any distinctions based on anything other than their credentials."

Assigned Counsel seeks out candidates from a wide variety of organizations, including those identified with minority groups.

"We're looking for the talent, not the ethnicity," Murphy says. "We find that if we are posting our jobs in a variety of places, mainstream as well as more obscure, we can source the best candidates for our clients."

The lawyers they seek to hire also appreciate the open-door policy, which makes it possible for candidates from a wide variety of backgrounds to be placed.

"We're inclusive of everyone, and we will give you the very best – which will most likely include diverse candidates," Austin says. "While we don't focus on a specific minority group or type of person, we get a wide range of different types of people from different groups because we source our talent through so many avenues. We don't care where you're from – if you're good for the position, we'll place you there."

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