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## Law firms fight to retain young associates

Dayton Business Journal - by [Yvonne Teems](#) DBJ Contributor

In his first few weeks on the job and just months out of law school, associate lawyer Matthew Molloy of **Dinsmore & Shohl** was working with big-name clients such as **Procter & Gamble Co.** and **Toyota Motor Corp.**

After hearing depressing stories about young associates joining law firms only to do grunt work, Molloy was pleased he got to interact with clients, develop his skills and build his business.

Now four years into his tenure at Dinsmore & Shohl, Molloy has no plans to leave. He looks forward to honing his skills as an intellectual property lawyer and potentially make partner in a few years.

Molloy, 31, is a success story for Dinsmore and Shohl, especially as law firms nationwide are dealing with the challenge of retaining young lawyers.

A study by the **NALP Foundation** found that among 118 law firms across the country, 19 percent of associate lawyers, or 2,815, left in 2006, amounting to two-thirds of the firms' hiring. Of those who left, 15 percent, or about 420, left within two years and 75 percent, or 2,100 left within five years.

These younger lawyers depart their first jobs to go into corporate practice, find a new practice area or seek more opportunities to refine their skills.

But law firms are fighting back. They're looking to retain more young associates by implementing new training programs and offering more work opportunities.

Jim Gottman, managing partner of Dinsmore & Shohl's Dayton office, said almost all law firms are implementing new programs to retain new associates.

"It's a significant problem," Gottman said. "You invest a lot of money and time and effort in a new lawyer, and then you see that investment go out the door."

That's part of why Dinsmore & Shohl offers networking and training programs that help associates develop on their paths to partnership. In May, the firm's associates gathered in Cincinnati for a retreat: They heard from managing partners, networked with one another and then went to a **Cincinnati Reds** game, Gottman said.

Molloy said the event gave him the chance to meet and build relationships with other lawyers



James E. Mahan

James Gottman, (left) partner at Dinsmore & Shohl LLP in Dayton, and Matthew Molloy, a lawyer at the firm, say the firm is putting an emphasis on training new recruits to keep them with the firm.

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in the firm. He added that the firm's training program during his first year -- called the Leadership Academy -- taught him basic lawyer skills through monthly seminars. He learned how to bill his time, deal with clients and write like a lawyer. He also had formal and informal mentors who helped him get on his feet.

"My skills have developed immeasurably since I started," Molloy said. "They train you very well."

With an eight-month-old daughter, Molloy appreciates that the firm allows him to make time for his family, taking time off work when she was first born and attending doctor's appointments when they come up.

Gottman said retaining young associates starts with hiring the right associates. Last year, the firm changed the way it interviews prospective employees. Instead of talking with many candidates for 15 to 20 minutes each, the firm selects a few candidates it can intensely question for more than 40 minutes, Gottman said.

"We think that part of the way to have associates who stay with us, who are successful with us, is to do a better job of hiring the right people to begin with," he said.

New associates who come from other jobs -- instead of straight from law school -- also have a high success rate, Gottman said. Their prior seasoning prepares them for a longer tenure at their second job.

Charlie Faruki, managing partner at Faruki Ireland & Cox in Dayton, said he has noticed that new lawyers today possess a different attitude from lawyers of the past.

"You will hear junior lawyers use the expression, 'My first job,' which, years ago, you never heard," he said.

Faruki said his firm strives to retain young associates by giving them interesting work, offering training through **FI&C University** and encouraging bar association activities.

The firm's popular public defenders program allows young associates to work at the public defender's office for a few months so they can gain valuable experience while the firm continues to pay his or her salary.

"If a firm provides an interesting plate of work and opportunities both inside and outside the firm, I think that makes retention much smoother," Faruki said.

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