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HAPPY CAMPERS

Kilpatrick Townsend overhauls its summer associate hiring process.

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY THAT an Am Law 100 law firm tries a new recruiting strategy that actually pays off, but Kilpatrick, Townsend & Stockton did just that recently with its summer associates program.

While the summer program itself didn't change much, the firm drastically overhauled the way it selects its summer associates. Instead of bringing them back just for individual interviews, the firm brings all the finalists together over a weekend for a series of tasks. The young candidates who do especially well at them are offered summer positions. Kilpatrick's summer associates seemed to like the result: The Atlanta-based firm recently jumped to third in our 2015 Summer Associate Satisfaction Survey, up from 27th place last year.

"I believe that is the sort of approach that law firms need to take," says University of Colorado Law School Dean Phil Weiser, a critic of law firm recruitment procedures, "They are the only law firm I've heard about doing this. If you hire people only on grades, law schools and lunch conversation, you will miss out on what clients want." James Leipold, executive director of the National Association for Law Placement, notes that corporations and consulting firms often use similar recruiting techniques.

Kilpatrick Townsend rolled out the program in the fall of 2014. During a weekend in Atlanta, 30 candidates were



divided into small groups and given a series of team-based activities—including a treasure hunt with clues and producing a video pitching a pro-bono client's product to an investor—while firm leaders and staff observed. Applicants were also given a timed writing exercise, and were interviewed by several partners. For next summer's hires, the program has been expanded to include all 60 summer associate candidates.

Litigator Charlie Henn, chairman of Kilpatrick Townsend's hiring committee, took over the summer program last year and sat down with staff to rethink the entire hiring process. "We decided that simply doing more one-on-one interviews didn't give us meaningful information about the candidates, given how our lawyers work," Henn says. "We work in teams all the time. Not one-on-one."

'REALLY COOL'

Stephen Dew, 37, a third-year student at the University of North Carolina School

Candidates spent a weekend working together on a range of group tasks.

of Law, was a summer associate in Atlanta in 2015, and has accepted an offer to start as a full-time associate at Kilpatrick next year. "This was really cool," Dew says of the recruiting process. "Law school is a place you get a lot of people who are really about themselves and about winning." But the Kilpatrick activities focused on "whether they can put competitiveness behind them, and a lot of them couldn't, and [it weeded] out people who wanted to win at all costs."

Henn says he thinks the new summer hiring process yielded happier associates because it helped select budding lawyers who fit in well with the way the firm operates. And it didn't hurt that summer associates got to know each other early on, says Wade Hooper, chief strategic growth officer and director of attorney recruiting. "It was a very cohesive group," he says.

—MP McQueen