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Growth and excitement

Firms opening up the way they do work is paying off in recruitment



Illustration by Jeremie Lederman

By **John McNally**
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Benesch and Ice Miller, respectively, were the two law firms with the largest percentage of attorney growth since last year, [according to Chicago Lawyer magazine's 2020 Largest Law Firms Survey](#).

New year, same result

After opening in 2015, the Benesch office in Chicago continues to expand at a rapid pace. This

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year it grew to a reported 63 attorneys (up from 47) for a total of 34% growth from 2019.

Checking the boxes

David Pope, a co-managing partner of the Chicago office, said 2019 was just another year of following a successful blueprint in attracting and cultivating the elite talent in and around Chicago.

"We just continued to follow through on our strategy of growth," Pope said. "We are clearly up and running and continue to get attorneys from top firms here in Chicago that want to work with other attorneys who have been at top firms in Chicago. But, do it at a lower rate and in an environment that's a little less stringent and more flexible, and more youthful and energetic."

Pope noted how Benesch has made a concentrated effort to find a roster of attorneys who mesh well together. That camaraderie, Pope said, has helped Benesch in its recruitment efforts.

"We've capitalized on that by word of mouth in particular. We've got strong recruiters working for us and the success breeds success in recruiting," Pope said. "A candidate will see that a half dozen other similarly situated candidates from top firms that have moved here and (that makes the candidate) more interested in moving here."

"There is a consistency of personality here. The people who come to consider the firm recognize in one another the type of attitude they have about practicing law, client service, excellence, work/life balance. I think like-minded people want to be around other like-minded people."

Benesch's new offices at 71 S. Wacker Drive have helped the firm grow too. The firm also focused on assimilating all its new talent by having a dedicated partner in charge of integration. New lawyers to the Chicago office go on the road to firm headquarters in Cleveland, to San Francisco, Delaware and other Benesch offices to meet with team members to discuss where the practice's growth opportunities are.

Pope said he doesn't expect another year of large-scale expansion at the Chicago office, but he said the team will continue to coalesce and expand in ways beyond attorney head counts.

"It's been a great run. I think moving over (to the new office) as a group over the summer from our previous space which was somewhat makeshift because we were too big for our existing space. To migrate over here as one big team, and one big office, really brought us together in a way that I wouldn't have anticipated.

"When you have people coming on as quickly we did, it can feel like the firm is always changing. This move was a hard reset for us. So that everyone who was there when we moved feels like they're part of the new Benesch Chicago. People don't feel like they're the newest person," Pope said.

Ice Miller

Chicago office managing partner John David Burke has an open mind and it's allowed Ice Miller to grow, especially in Chicago. The firm has made overtures to talented attorneys that might be experiencing malaise with Big Law's billable hour demands.

"One thing that is different is we emphasize going out and getting work for the firm and less emphasis on individual billing books," Burke said. "There's more of an emphasis here on teamwork and hunting in packs than individual billing books."



Ice Miller reported an increase of total attorneys in Illinois to 55 from 43 in last year's survey, amounting to a 27.9% growth year-over-year.

Burke enjoys seeing Ice Miller attorneys from across practice groups get together for lunches or an after-work theater experience. He said he believes it benefits the firm, which allows for a free flow of ideas on how to accomplish work and goals.

"The firm is a traditional partnership. That was something that was different and surprising to a lot of people. Everyone has a voice and they have an opportunity to have an immediate impact upon the firm," he said. "There isn't a lot of resistance here. We don't say 'well, we don't do it that way here.' We're open to new ways of trying things."

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