

# Drinker Biddle

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Contact: John M. Byrne | 215-988-2597 | [John.Byrne@dbr.com](mailto:John.Byrne@dbr.com)

***Listening to Our Clients, Adding the Value They Want***

## **Drinker Biddle Launches Much-Heralded Training Program for First Year Lawyers**

PHILADELPHIA – Like no other large national law firm, Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP today begins a new era in the training and professional development of its first year lawyers. In a move long sought by clients, Drinker Biddle has taken an industry-leading position by increasing the quality and intensity of its new lawyers' training, while lowering the first years' billable requirements and rates.

"At a time when other large law firms have delayed or dismissed their fall 2009 incoming classes of new lawyers, we have chosen a different path," said Drinker Biddle Chairman Alfred W. Putnam, Jr. "As we announced this past May, we are bringing in 38 new associates and training them to be top-notch professionals, skilled in providing the best in service to our clients."

Clients greeted the announcement of the firm's new training program with unqualified praise. The program also attracted national attention from the media and legal scholars advocating change in the way large law firms do business. Several law professors have recognized Drinker Biddle's innovation and leadership, noting that it was the first AmLaw 100 firm with a "sensible" strategy for first year lawyers. Even the notoriously hard-to-please "Above the Law" blog called Drinker Biddle's new program "refreshingly logical."

"Our clients have been very enthusiastic about this idea," Putnam said, "and we see it as a way to redefine the relationship between clients and their law firms. We want to be in a position where we can provide value to the client in literally every decision we make and every action we take."

The innovative new program took shape in the past several months as Drinker Biddle sought to be as responsive as possible to what Drinker Biddle Executive Partner Andrew C. Kassner describes as the "paradigm shift" in the legal profession, perhaps best exemplified by the Association of Corporate Counsel's Value Challenge.

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“Through the ACC and other venues, clients have made it abundantly clear that things need to change. The status quo really was unacceptable,” said Kassner. “We listened and developed our new training program as a result.”

The training program will last six months, during which the new lawyers’ time will be divided into three main parts: a core curriculum, practice-specific training and an “apprenticeship.”

All of the First Years will attend the core curriculum coursework for the first six weeks of the program. This initial coursework will focus on working as a client-centered lawyer, including the art of delivering high-quality service to clients at the lowest possible cost. There will be instruction and interactive presentations as well as exercises in writing, ethics, negotiation, presentation skills, problem-solving, teamwork and collaboration. Additionally, woven into the core coursework will be several presentations by some of the firm’s clients, to give the First Years their important perspective.

“It is important for our new lawyers to cover these types of topics as a group,” said Drinker Biddle partner Kate Levering, who is running the firm’s training program and is responsible for its design and implementation. “They will be working for our clients – and with each other – for quite some time.”

After the initial six weeks, the new lawyers will turn their attention to working with their respective practice groups for more customized training that relates to their practice area and the clients whom they will be serving. For litigators, for example, this part of the program will include topics such as managing discovery appropriately, writing compelling and successful briefs, and appearing and arguing in the courtroom. Transactional lawyers, on the other hand, will be introduced to the various components of a deal, from inception to closing.

The apprenticeship portion of the First Years training program will follow, and will be a throwback to the ways lawyers were trained only a few generations ago.

“These new lawyers will be spending a great deal of time with partners and other more experienced lawyers, going places where our lawyers go, and doing (and watching) what our lawyers do,” said Gregg Melinson, Drinker Biddle’s national marketing partner. “This is how many of our more senior partners were trained by the previous generation of Drinker Biddle’s lawyers. We see tremendous value in this approach for our clients and for our firm.”

One of the most important aspects of the apprenticeship portion – and the program in total – is learning about the firm’s clients, said Melinson. “Our clients tell us that some of the most valuable advice and counsel comes from those lawyers who have an intimate knowledge of their clients’ businesses and their clients’ industries as a whole,” he said. “This training program is a way to get that message across loud and clear, early and often.”

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One of the ways that Drinker Biddle is able to provide the time for such training was the decision to free the new lawyers from any requirement regarding billable work for clients during the program.

“It seemed contradictory to us to require such a significant investment of the first year lawyers’ time and energy while adding the further burden of a billable hour requirement,” said Putnam, the firm’s Chairman.

At the end of the program in spring 2010, Drinker Biddle anticipates that the new First Years will hit the ground not only running, but sprinting.

“We will be able to offer our clients these junior lawyers, who will be in a position to provide real value, unlike many of our competitor firms who won’t even have new lawyers coming into their firms until the following fall,” said Putnam. “We think it will make a qualitative – and lasting – difference in the service we can provide to our clients.”

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*Drinker Biddle & Reath LLP is a national law firm with 700 lawyers in 12 offices providing outstanding client service in areas such as commercial litigation, corporate and securities, corporate restructuring, intellectual property, government and regulatory affairs, labor and employment, investment management, environmental, communications litigation, products liability and mass tort litigation, health care, employee benefits and executive compensation, insurance coverage, life insurance and annuities, real estate and private client services.*