

Lessons
in Leadership:

**An Interview
with**

#BakersDozen
on
High Performance
Counsel



HIGH PERFORMANCE COUNSEL

#BakersDozen: Founder & President, Jennifer J. Scalzi

#BakersDozen is a series of interviews with leading professionals in the fields of law, consulting, finance, tech, and more.



Jennifer J. Scalzi:

President and Founder, J. Johnson Executive Search

Tell us a bit about yourself and how you came to be in (or a customer of) the legal business?

I fell into a law firm HR role in 1998 after meeting a partner at a fundraiser for a campaign I was working on in Texas. He encouraged me to call him if I needed a job when the campaign was over. So I did.

What do you do for a living right now?

I am the Founder and President of an Executive Search Firm that specializes in placing business services professionals into law firms.

What has been your greatest triumph and your greatest success in the legal services field and what did you learn from each?

A triumph for our company has been to win pitches against larger, name brand search firms – more than once! A success for us has been that we have become an ear for our clients and contacts about their important decisions whether it's how to shape the growth of their departments for the evolving future or as individuals what they can do to be at the cutting edge and highly marketable.

Do you think the legal industry is headed in the right direction, the wrong direction – or which direction?

I think there is a portion of the industry that is headed in the right direction and a larger portion who is not. There are many law firms out there who are led by Partners who cannot put their own ego aside and allow others who might have more gifts in terms of running a business to do their jobs.

While I do predict that a dozen or so law firms will be history in the next decade, whether by takeover or dissolution, I do believe that the industry is in a slow progression towards upping the level of sophistication about how they do business – everything from hiring practices, employer branding/employee engagement, corporate social responsibility, and embracing the future.

Who – or what – inspires you – and why?

I am inspired when I see someone raise their hand and say something that others can learn from. People who put themselves out there for the purpose of growing their mindset and, in turn, wind up teaching others in the process. It's usually the most understated people who have the biggest nuggets of wisdom.

What advice would you give to the younger generation contemplating law as a career?

My team and I are constantly promoting this industry to talent in other professional services firms and we enjoy this part of our job. There is a tremendous amount of value that others can bring to the industry if they have a high-enough EQ to play the internal politics in their favor. For the next generation, I'd say that this is an industry where client service is paramount. And they pay really well.

Other professional services firms are so behemoth and matrixed that it is hard to see the top and their layers prevent getting to the top, both in terms of opportunity/title and compensation, really difficult. There's a straighter site line to the top in legal. But the key is to always think one step ahead of any situation you're in. If you don't, you'll be left behind.

The next generation of buyers will absolutely not look like the last two generations...

How ready for change do you think the legal industry is?

I think there is a subset of firms who are ready, willing and able. These are the firms that aren't looking to take over the world. They're shifting to the next generation of leaders, putting the right business people in place to run the day-to-day, listening to their clients, analyzing the data and making really smart, and sometimes uncomfortable, decisions. I can think of about 8 firms that I'm excited to see "grow up" to give some of the traditional firms a run for their money, even if they only take a healthy portion of market share in a particular geography, industry or practice from the larger firms. That's a "win" in their book.

Is more – or different – leadership required? In what ways?

Different leaders are required. It's important that the majority of lawyers recognize that their gifts are in solving legal problems. There are absolutely some who are gifted at making rain and they have strong opinions about how to do so. But, I think it's rare that someone who has grown up in a law firm practice who didn't go to business school to be a person who leads a firm into the future.

We need people who are trained and proven experts in all of the various service lines in law firms to take the reins and to be tasked with providing input, delivery and ultimately value to the business. There is a large amount of education that needs to happen in order for this shift to occur. I find that most firm partners don't know what they should know, which causes decisions to be made without full information. Unfortunately, this industry is full of people who are trying to help lawyers make decisions so the task of finding someone to guide you from the outside can seem overwhelming. Another case for bringing the talent inside a firm and using an executive search partner who knows an industry well to bring the right people to the table.

Are consultants and lawyers looking increasingly similar? Should the distinction continue?

I think teaching lawyers how to consult would be an amazing, and welcome, value-add to their clients.

What's the one most significant factor that will drive change in your view?

The next generation of buyers will absolutely not look like the last two generations, and firms who do not embrace this change in an authentic way will be the ones to lose market share the fastest.

Wildcard Questions

If you weren't doing this, what would you be doing?

I think I'm where I'm supposed to be. I really like what I do and where our firm is headed. If I had to do something else, I might want to run a non-profit.

What would you like to be known for?

I always say "there is a place for every body and a body for every place" and I believe that. I want to be known as someone who has a vision for seeing diverse value and finding the intersections between people and firms to help them both make quality, long-term decisions.

What would surprise everyone if they knew (they may now).

I went to college on a vocal performance scholarship but switched my sophomore year to Political Science with a focus on Middle Eastern Studies and Arabic.

What's your favorite hobby or activity outside of law?

Photography and golf.

What's your favorite sports team?

I have been instructed that my favorite teams are Boston-based, despite being raised in Texas and living nearly a decade in NYC.

What's your favorite city?

Istanbul

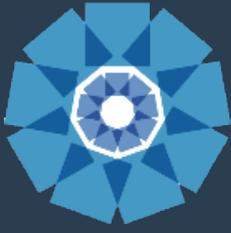
What's your favorite food?

Tex-Mex

What's your nickname – and why?

My father calls me “squirt” to this day.

This interview reflects the opinions of the author, and not of their affiliated organizations, or of High Performance Counsel



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