

Does Your Law Firm Culture Have an Uber Problem?

In her song "[Victim of Circumstance](#)," Joan Jett sings, "Just a victim of bad reputation/I got no chance of shakin'." Well, last month was not good for the reputation of Uber, the behemoth online transportation network company. Allegations of a dysfunctional company culture surfaced that included [claims of rampant sexual harassment](#) and fierce, internal competition among employees.

In 2010, at an elaborate staff retreat, Uber CEO Travis Kalanick unveiled the company's 14 values, which reportedly took hundreds of hours to conceive. Unfortunately, in the context of recent events, it seems that corporate values may have been little more than an afterthought for Uber.

Uber, like most companies, is under a tremendous amount of pressure to produce results, and its culture is not unique. According to a recent [article](#) at Law.com, "The legal profession has never been more cutthroat. As the race for revenue intensifies, firms are putting more pressure on their partners to perform in a number of criteria. If they don't, it will be reflected in their compensation, title and possibly their place in the firm."

Every organization, including law firms, has a culture. Company culture can be understood to equate to the personality of a company. It includes a variety of elements, including work environment, company mission, value, ethics, expectations and goals. The problem is that your law firm's culture affects far more than how your attorneys and staff feel about the firm and their work. Work culture also plays a part in how the outside world feels about your firm and can improve or hurt the performance of a business in a number of areas.

Current and Potential Clients

In today's technological landscape, how current and former employees feel about your company culture can make an appearance quickly and permanently in all sorts of online public forums, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Glassdoor, etc. Word spreads faster than ever, and it will influence how the general public feels about your company, including current and potential clients. This can be a really powerful marketing tool for your company, or it can have the opposite effect.

If your law firm has a reputation as a "bad" place to work, even if you deliver great legal services, such a reputation may drive current clients away and may make potential clients think twice about using your firm. In addition, a well-regarded business reputation can allow a law firm to charge a higher price for legal services.



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Retention and Recruitment

In a company that values workers for their contributions to the business, employees experience high morale and a positive attitude toward the organization. Workers with a positive attitude are loyal to the organization, which reduces employee turnover. Worker turnover has a high cost to a business, with increased costs for recruitment, hiring and training to replace those who leave. A healthy corporate culture can help a company retain valuable employees and reduce human resources costs.

One of the most obvious impacts of poor company culture is on recruitment. To stay competitive, you have to attract the best talent. It's no surprise that the best talent is attracted to the organizations with the best culture. Law firms are no exception. This information is not only spread through word of mouth, but is also now readily accessible through websites like [Glassdoor](#).

Unethical Behavior

Your law firm's culture has a profound effect on the ethical behavior of your employees. A positive corporate culture encourages employees to behave in responsible, ethical ways, resulting in a happy workplace, team collaboration and employee empowerment. Negative corporate cultures, on the other hand, promote unethical behavior, such as sexual harassment, causing a wide variety of problems, some of which can lead to litigation.

Broken Cultures Should Be Fixed

A broken company culture is the result of a lot of problems. Once broken, it is difficult to correct. In his [article](#) for the *Harvard Business Review*, [Michael D. Watkins](#), an author and professor of leadership and organizational change, writes, "... culture change can be managed as a continuous process rather than through big shifts (often in response to crises). Likewise, it highlights the idea that a stable 'destination' may never – indeed should never – be reached. The culture of the organization should always be learning and developing."

Culture is a double-edged sword. It can be a positive force, driving a law firm to achievement. When it's negative, culture can hurt a law firm and its people. Want to learn more about how Jaffe can help your firm with its public reputation? Contact me, [Carlos Arcos](#), at carcos@jaffepr.com.