

Business & Practice

Cooley Recruits Texas Lawyers, Offering Fully Remote Jobs (1)

By Chris Opfer

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- Cooley joins other firms making some job offers full-time remote
 - Recruiting war has shifted power dynamic in favor of attorneys
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Cooley is looking to hire lawyers in Texas, even though the California-founded law firm's closest offices are roughly 1,000 miles away.

The firm in recent weeks has offered jobs to corporate associates at Sidley Austin and other rivals in Texas, according to three sources familiar with Cooley's recruiting efforts. The firm told those lawyers that they can work remotely rather than in one of Cooley's 11 U.S. offices.

At least three lawyers have turned down the offers. Cooley, through a spokesperson, declined to comment.

The moves are the latest sign of the rapidly shifting dynamic in a war for corporate associates. Lawyers with coveted experience have the power to fetch big bonuses and demand remote work opportunities.

The hires also reflect the growing recognition that some attorneys prefer to continue working from home after a year or more away from the office during the pandemic.

"I'm seeing that many associates have enjoyed, and have gotten used to, remote work through Covid," said Bryan Silver, who oversees associate recruiting for The Attorney Search Group. "The fact that their firm will be returning to a fully in-office paradigm has been a popular reason for being curious about other opportunities."

Goodwin Procter earlier this year began hiring associates in cities where the firm doesn't have offices, like Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, Miami, and Philadelphia, allowing those lawyers to work from anywhere full-time. Perkins Coie has also reportedly made fully remote offers to associates, while Husch Blackwell last year launched a "virtual office" with some 40 remote lawyers.

Many firms preparing to bring lawyers and staff back in droves in the coming months have said they will allow those employees to continue to clock in from anywhere at least some of the time. Those arrangements vary widely, with firms like Ropes & Gray and Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom asking lawyers to hit the office at least three days a week.

Fully remote positions could help firms recruit diverse attorneys from a wider range of geographic areas, said Michele DeStefano, a legal consultant and professor at the University of Miami School of Law. But those jobs also pose some risks for both firms and associates looking to eventually make partner.

"How do you create a firm culture and how do make sure remote associates are allocated work on a fair basis?" she said. "Associates in regional offices already find it hard to get the different types of work and the face time they need to advance."

Cooley, which is headquartered in Silicon Valley, is best known for advising tech companies and venture capital outfits. Its client list includes Tesla Inc., the electric car company that recently announced a highly publicized move from California to Texas.

The firm in May launched a new Chicago office and has lawyers in L.A., San Diego, Denver, New York and Northern Virginia, among other locations.

(Updated to include comments from DeStefano in Ninth and Tenth paragraphs.)

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