

2011 Book of Law

South Florida
**BUSINESS
JOURNAL**

Lawyers looking for lateral moves in demand

By Larry Keller

South Florida law firms are cautiously planning to do more hiring this year, with far more opportunities for lateral transfers than entry-level attorneys.



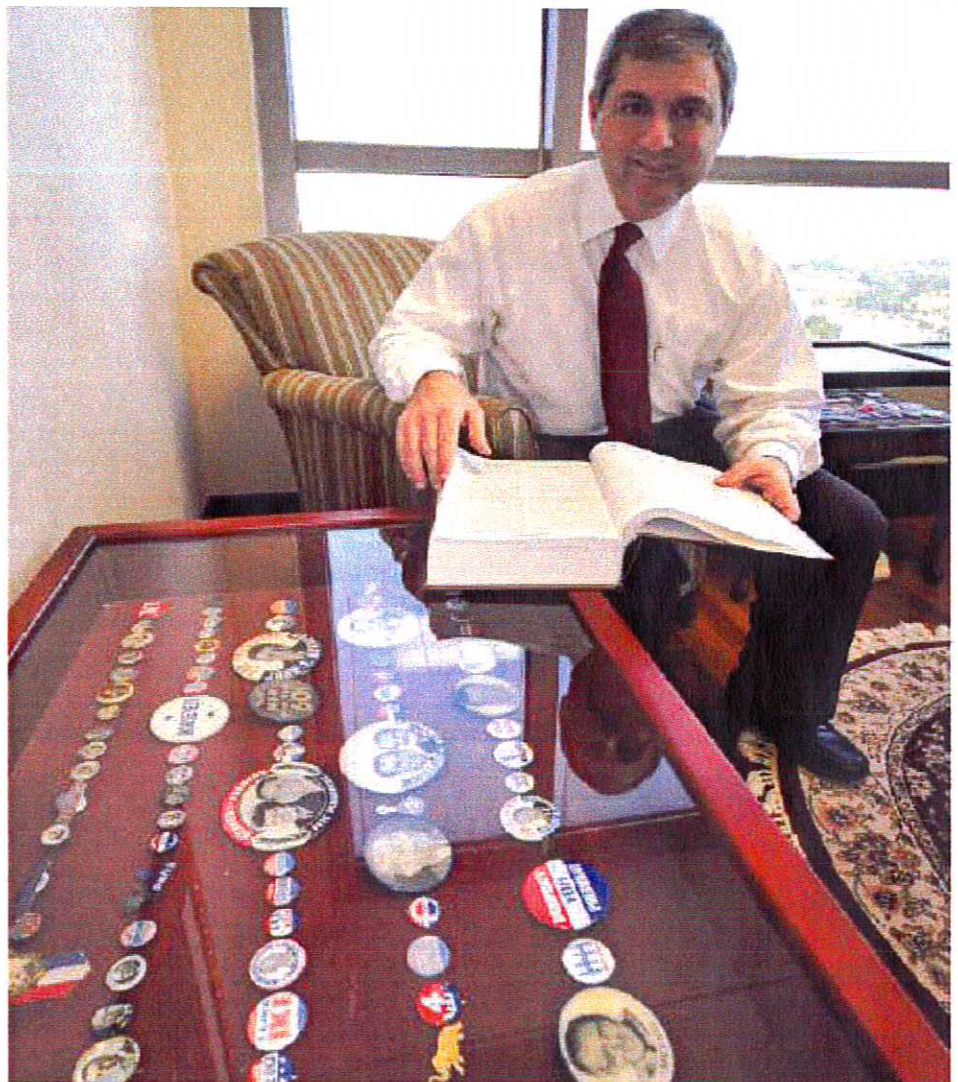
Topolski

Lateral partner transfers should be an option for lawyers "with a large book of business," said Scott Topolski, partner-in-charge of the Boca Raton

office of Buckingham, Doolittle & Burroughs.

Jamie Cole agreed.

"What I'm hearing is that everyone is looking to hire laterals," said the Fort Lauderdale-based managing director of Weiss, Serota, Helfman, Pastori-za, Cole & Boniske.



'We have found that there is a lot of talent out there that is available,' Fort Lauderdale attorney Jamie Cole says.

It's not uncommon for a non-equity partner to be outperforming his law firm and not receive bonuses that he feels he should have earned and look elsewhere to be paid accordingly, Cole said. "We have found that there is a lot of talent out there that is available."

Arnstein & Lehr is among the law firms focused on hiring senior lateral transfers from other firms this year.

"The market in South Florida is much more robust" than in Chicago because there are more troubled law firms and some that have disbanded, said Ray Werner, the firm's Chicago-based chairman.

"It certainly offers opportunities," added Jeff Shapiro, the Miami-based coordinating partner of the firm's five Florida offices.

The going is tougher now for lawyers still hoping to become partners, Shapiro said. "You have to be making a better contribution hours-wise, and bringing in business."

Lawyers who have been laid off by law firms that struggled or failed may do all right if they have remained active, such as in a solo practice, Cole said. There isn't the stigma once associated with losing a job because now there are "a lot of very good lawyers who have been laid off," he noted.

Laid-off lawyers will be considered on a "candidate-by-candidate basis" at Arnstein & Lehr, Shapiro said.

As for associates, Topolski likes potential hires to have two to four years of experience "because there's less of a learning curve."

Cole said the hiring of associates "is a little bit quiet" and "it really depends on the amount of experience, not years" for associates to be hired.

Paralegals will continue to be in demand, according to Shapiro and Cole. "Our use has been pretty steady," Shapiro said. That should continue, he said, especially with the increase in electronic discovery that is typically handled by paralegals.

"A really good paralegal is extremely valuable," Cole said.

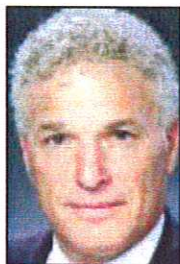
For entry-level lawyers, the forecast is much more gloomy.

"It's a tough task for people coming out of law school," Topolski said. "There are a lot more candidates than jobs for entry-level people. It's a real tough market."

Cole agreed.

"We are not currently hiring entry-level attorneys," he said. "With the market the way it is, I don't think other firms are hiring entry-level lawyers."

Many law firms have eliminated summer programs that led to jobs for young associates, but Arnstein & Lehr is not among them.



Shapiro

"We're typically not looking for law students one to three years out because we have home-grown" talent that can be tapped from the summer program, Shapiro said.

At Buckingham, Doolittle & Burroughs, Topolski would say only that the overall goal in 2011 is to hire enough people so the firm is larger than last year.

Elsewhere in South Florida, "I think people are hiring less, by and large," he said. "But insurance defense firms are always looking to hire."

The number of attorneys with Cole's firm, which also has an office in Coral Gables, has grown by about 20 percent in the past three years, bringing the total to 54, he said. The firm will probably add about the same number of lawyers in 2011 as it did in the last year or two, he said.

Arnstein & Lehr also will be hiring in the months ahead, but not drastically.

"I think the key word is caution," Shapiro said.