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U.S. Lawyer Secondments to Indian LPOs?

In January, LPO provider Cobra Legal Solutions LLC (“Cobra”) announced a secondment program for U.S.-barred lawyers who would like to work at its Chennai, India facility for between two and six months. Global Legal sees the secondment program as a winning idea for the individuals who participate, Cobra’s outsourcing clients, and for Cobra itself. Cobra clients that decide to second one of their attorneys to Chennai will gain even more benefit.

Individuals who participate in the program will benefit from direct experience in an emerging part of legal practice. As a general counsel or a law firm partner, it would be very useful to intimately understand the strengths and weaknesses of the offshore model as it applies to discovery review and the other legal services. An attorney with LPO secondment experience will also be able to optimize law firm or legal department processes to get the full advantage of outsourcers. Further benefits include the ability to absorb the best practices from learning about multiple clients, gaining a broad overview of the legal services marketplace, and experiencing work and life in a global context that is becoming increasingly important to the practice of corporate law. This experience will likely be very attractive to a law firms or corporate legal departments. Obviously, candidates for secondment to Chennai should think hard about whether or not they are adventurous enough to manage some of the vagaries of living in India (which I understand from first-hand experience). However, for the right person, it would be a great personal and professional learning experience.

Cobra clients will potentially benefit in two ways. First and foremost, they get additional supervision and management for their engagements from a person with American litigation training and experience. In addition, as the program continues there will be a continuing stream of individuals with experience in the latest advances in e-discovery applying new and different ideas reviewing their operations. The various perspectives enable incremental improvements from which clients will benefit. Clients that second

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their own employees to Cobra will benefit from having an individual knowledgeable in their processes and priorities manage their deals and reviews while training and supervising their Indian lawyer teams. Returning secondees will have personal and professional relationships that should improve the quality and efficiency of their future work with Cobra, and may also be in a position to provide insights that will benefit the client's negotiations with Cobra.

Cobra benefits by having persons with different perspectives and experiences in the U.S. legal system train and supervise its Indian lawyers. Maybe most significantly, Cobra will create a set of ambassadors who will expand understanding of LPO in the U.S. legal services market, and, ideally, highlight Cobra's place in it.

The potential pitfalls of such an arrangement are few. Aside from the standard considerations about hiring a person with the right aptitudes and attitudes, and the industry-specific potential legal conflicts upon return to a legal employer, the major potential pitfall is the ability of the secondee to adapt his or her personal life to the culture and customs of Chennai, India.

The secondment program, much like Cobra's Least Cost Pricing Plan that Global Legal discussed in a previous post, benefits Cobra while simultaneously creating additional value for its customers. I'll be surprised if other LPO vendors don't make this opportunity available as well.

<http://globallegal.wordpress.com/2011/03/02/u-s-lawyer-secondments-to-indian-lpos/>

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