

# Merging Can Threaten Your Law Firm's Culture. Innovate Instead



**Greenberg Traurig chairman Richard Rosenbaum says merging with another law firm can threaten cultural gains and undermine staffing, and that innovating with an eye to client needs is a more effective approach.**

**By Richard Rosenbaum | [August 1, 2023](#) | Bloomberg Law**

The legal profession is facing changes so completely out of our control that the future track is up in the air—from how we continue to attract law students (no, robots aren't coming for our jobs) to reiterating the value of in-person collaboration for experienced lawyers and professional staff serving clients far from "the home office"—this all needs to happen without losing your culture or financial footing.

Oh, yes, and then there are mergers, that, for the most part, threaten your culture and business more profoundly and quickly than any AI program now available.

Of course, the best time to plan for something is before there is a need. At Greenberg Traurig, we have long been fortunate by preparing for changes in the marketplace well before these became emergency scenarios or follow-the-herd reactions.

We live our core values, like empowering and respecting individuals so they can compete on the ground, financial discipline without needless bureaucracy, and putting our clients first. We commit to the solid decentralized approach that fuels our growth by attracting lawyers in new markets who share these values and are market leaders.

These values have allowed our firm to remain proactive for many years, anticipating change and intensely executing to adapt, even when the world is seemingly on fire. We've made most of our best moves during challenging or uncertain times. And we've avoided the quick fix of a merger, despite our enormous growth.

Mergers can amplify just about all the negatives affecting a law firm, either from internal committee-think or other forms of bureaucracy or politics (and consultants planning your strategy). Mergers create a sense of winners and losers within the firm, while playing a spotlight on legacy decisions, or the impact of geopolitical and socio-economic upheaval, without the ability to nimbly adapt and compete everywhere.

Given our firm has never done a merger, it may seem I'm not qualified to address the downfalls of law firm mergers and why this is a particularly difficult time to put your firm through one. Difficult economic times often generate what many call "opportunities" to merge.

Greenberg Traurig hasn't done any mergers because we understand the pitfalls. And although, and perhaps because, we haven't done a merger, we've grown from three lawyers in Florida to approximately 2,700 attorneys in 47 offices in 13 countries—a global legal services leader. By comparison, few mergers have achieved their stated goals despite initial fanfare.

Common dangers in mergers include dilution of culture and brand, client disruption, loss of financial autonomy, loss of leaders' ability to make locally critical decisions, dissatisfaction and attrition, business and legal conflicts, disruption to normal workflow and loss of productivity, loss of transparency and increased bureaucracy, and loss of bespoke client service, among others.

### **How to Grow a Firm Without Merging**

Make independent decisions for who you are, often growing when others pull back and ignoring pressure to grow and overpay during good times. Creating a culture and business model that are uniquely positioned for any cycle takes time. Being disciplined in all cycles takes collaboration.

Have no excuses. We continue to be conservative in our approach, but we do not have excuses to do anything less than maximally perform, better than expected. How? Our laser focus is on being the exception to any rule that says otherwise.

Make every day count. Exceed even your own expectations. "Good enough" is never an option.

Innovate, innovate, innovate. And this advice is not limited to just technology.

On that last note, one of the greatest potential disruptors in the legal profession today is the remote work climate. For some in niche roles, situations, or markets, it can work. For many, if not properly managed, it's a real threat to not only attorney and client engagement, but also to the fostering of a diverse workforce where all have the opportunity to find their brand of success.

### **What Law Firm Leaders Can Do**

Innovation is the secret sauce. Well-managed firms working as one, with one voice, in a decentralized model can offer their highly experienced talent diverse locations designed with the technology and space planning needed to efficiently meet their needs closer to where they and clients live.

These locations will play a greater role in creating opportunities for the workforce, while at the same time delivering the inherent benefits of in-office collaboration. Be flexible and listen closely to lawyers of all generations, making decisions based on what makes sense.

When you have planned early on for alternatives to traditional markets, you can better address talent's needs. That's particularly important if one of your core values is to offer clients legal teams with a full spectrum of capabilities, backgrounds, and perspectives, and staff members with varied educational, business, and life experiences. There's real value to clients in having access to diversity of thought and experience.

Learn to see beyond "location/business/technology as usual" to bolster your culture and ultimately your firm's future as a leader. This takes innovation, branding, cultural cohesiveness, meritocracy, empowered entrepreneurs, and economic leadership, each being a challenge post-any merger to say the least.

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