

## Innovative Managing Partner: Reed Smith's Greg Jordan

By **Daniel Wilson**

*Law360, New York (October 04, 2012, 5:23 PM ET)* -- A program to solicit feedback from all staff, leading to dozens of improvements across the firm, is just one of a number of initiatives led by Reed Smith LLP global managing partner Greg Jordan, earning him a spot on Law360's list of America's Most Innovative Managing Partners.

The Brainstorm Barnstorm program is part of a culture of innovation stemming from Jordan's 12-year tenure as global managing partner for Reed Smith — a period which has led to explosive growth for the firm, from 600 lawyers in seven offices to more than 1,700 lawyers in 23 offices across three continents.

Brainstorm Barnstorm, which took place over the course of a year from 2011 into early 2012, had brought together two key focuses for Reed Smith under his leadership — business and client development and development of the firm's culture and talent — leading to “dozens and dozens” of improvements, Jordan said.

The program emerged from the idea of bringing the regular brainstorming meetings of the firm's senior management group to the rest of the firm. The management team then fanned out across all of the firm's offices to ask all staff — from the newest to the most senior — how they would improve their workplace. All good ideas, no matter the source and no matter how small, were considered.

“We have a strong commitment to maintaining an open and collaborative culture, which is harder in a global firm [than smaller firms],” Jordan said. “Brainstorm Barnstorm, at its heart, was an effort to get the best ideas wherever we could find them and promote ownership and engagement in the firm — all staff have a voice. To identify ideas and make them happen is a team game.”

A few common themes emerged from the sessions. One was technical improvements — helping to improve work flow, make processing of forms more efficient and other similar matters. Another was an attack on bureaucracy at the firm — giving partners streamlined access to business development funds, for example.

One of the strongest ideas to emerge from the process was the idea of building the Reed Smith brand, both to clients and internally, Jordan said.

Improvements to the firm's intranet, giving all staff quick access to both general information and daily information about work being done at the firm, the breadth of what the firm was capable of doing, industry trends and other matters had helped markedly with this, according to Jordan.

“Some markets we've been in for more than a hundred years, others just a year or two,” Jordan said. “We got a lot of ideas for how to make sure the firm is better known for what we're good at.”

Michael Pollack, Reed Smith's global head of strategy and a member of the firm's senior management committee alongside Jordan, backed the importance of the brainstorming process. For example, the firm recently implemented a partnership with the famed Wharton School to help develop business and leadership skills for its attorneys, an idea which had come out of the sessions, he said.

“Law firms are not generally a source of innovative ideas,” Pollack said. “[But] with Brainstorm Barnstorm, we got great ideas, and implemented them all — big or small. It further reinforced our culture of openness and looking for contributions from everybody.”

Many innovations to come out of the brainstorm project have also gone hand in hand with the firm's aim to build out its global platform to better serve the needs of its multinational clients — the firm is “heavily focused” on client input, Jordan said.

A lot of its best work has come in recent years after implementing solutions designed to respond to client feedback outlining their needs and problems following the recession, he said.

“We were hearing clear signals about cost pressures, with interest in broader partnerships and more value out of their legal relationships,” he said. “If we can drive down costs, we'll be more effective at delivering the needs of clients, which drives more business.”

A key to delivering that value was offering greater flexibility and “broadly and aggressively” customizing fee and work arrangements to fit client needs, with more than a third of the firm's business now coming from alternative-fee arrangements, according to Jordan.

“In effect, we're doing with clients what they do internally — customizing to what works for them — and they've responded incredibly well,” Jordan said. “If they're not sure how to go about something, they'll talk to us — here's what we're trying to do, how would you go about it?”

One of these alternative arrangements is Reed Smith's staff lawyer business, which has grown to between 80 and 100 attorneys, helping clients to do “higher volume, but important” work such as e-discovery and mortgage pleadings, and allowing them to monitor work being done against their budget or fixed-fee arrangement in real-time through a computer portal, Jordan said.

Also helping to serve this goal is the firm's global customer center, a freestanding facility near its Pittsburgh headquarters. The center, first established 10 years ago, operates 24 hours a day to provide back-office services, allowing the firm to improve customer service while simultaneously bringing down its costs.

“We've developed a reputation as being comfortable around innovating in our pricing and delivery model,” Jordan said.

PD Villarreal, senior vice president of global litigation at drugmaker GlaxoSmithKline PLC, a major Reed Smith client, agreed.

“We've tried to move away from a dependence on the billable hour,” Villarreal said. “Reed Smith has been a terrific partner [in that process] — they've really been a leader in that role.”

Villarreal said that Jordan essentially functioned “like the CEO of a pretty large professional services firm,” and his leadership had clearly set an emphasis at Reed Smith that “the client comes first,” helping clients not just with billable work but any other needs.

“Everybody talks that, few firms walk that,” Villarreal said. “Reed Smith is one of the few that walks the talk and I think Greg helps them in focusing.”

Colleen Davies, Reed Smith's global director of personnel and a member of the senior management team, said the firm's implementation of embedding project managers with client teams — another innovation sparked by the brainstorming process — was her highlight of the sessions and a great example of creativity under Jordan's leadership.

By embedding project managers, the firm was learning to maximize the efficiency of time spent on projects and more accurately determine budgets, how many lawyers were needed and the general range of time a project would take, Davies said.

“We've learned how to open up communication with clients on expectations better, and it encourages teamwork and creativity on our end — it's really been powerful,” she said.

Under Jordan, the firm has also seen a number of other innovations to help reshape its workforce, including a focus on bringing in smaller starting classes of associates and instead retaining the firm's existing lawyers. This emphasis on retention had involved embracing things other firms “typically haven't done,” such as merit-based pay to reward high achievers, Jordan said.

Career development is also a big part of the retention program, using consultancy-style mentoring to help attorneys develop broader, rounder competencies and work on any deficiencies at their own pace, which has helped reduce attrition, according to Jordan.

Jordan said that Reed Smith had also had success with programs to help promote diversity, including improving the number of both minorities and women in senior positions at the firm. These efforts were also being recognized externally, with advocacy group Women in Law Empowerment Forum giving the firm its “gold certificate” for the last two years running, Jordan said.

“We're the only global firm that has gotten a top score two years running — it's great validation [the program's] working and being recognized,” he said.

Jordan said he was on the road about 200 days a year to visit all of the firm's offices, constantly seeking feedback from staff, lawyers and clients, in an effort to help Reed Smith “own the intersection of quality and value,” a work ethic Davies backed up.

“What sets him apart is that clients are his constant center of gravity — business trends, client needs and how he can connect the firm's talent to client's needs,” Davies said. “After visiting clients, he's walking away with action item lists — what we need to do — and sending the firm's talent to help.”

Jordan's commitment to innovation and tireless work ethic had been a big factor in the firm's growth, according to Pollack.

“We were a big firm with a small geographic footprint, and we were facing situations where companies were going more global,” Pollack said. “We had to go bigger and in more places. It's not easy to do but he does it well, with a lot of energy and compassion.”

--Editing by Andrew Park.

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