

2023 FORREST SOLUTIONS RETURN-TO-OFFICE SURVEY RESULTS



Overview

It's time for law firms to be successful with hybrid operations. For the majority of law firm leaders, hybrid "success" means maximizing attorney presence in the office.

To understand this as the key metric, we can simply look at the permanent increase of WFH, which, prior to the pandemic was at 4.7% of the population and has now (following the COVID mandated closure spikes) leveled off at 27.7%, a nearly 6x increase.

Law firms are not immune. In fact, by the end of 2022, the vast majority of attorneys (86%) preferred some form of WFH whereas prior to the pandemic, less than 30% of attorneys reported this preference.

Leadership disagrees. Despite the historically robust economic performance of law firms during the mandated closure, there was never a sense from leadership that 100% remote working would become permanent for law firms.

Law firm leaders seemed to agree that key factors of what makes a firm a "Firm" is culture, collaboration and mentorship — and that these occur only in person.

After all of this, we are in the midst of a great experiment to see what works to get attorneys back into the office: do mandates work? Is "strongly encouraged" effective? What effect do amenities, from bagels to hot desking, have on worked days in the office?

We decided to ask the industry.

The Results

Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of firms (93%) have not returned to pre-Covid occupancy levels but are operating on a hybrid schedule. The majority of firms (66%) strongly suggest or recommend 2-3 days a week in the office. 20% of firms are mandating 2-3 days a week in the office. 7% of firms are mandating 4+ days in the office and 7% of firms have no policy at all.

Here's the thing, of this group of 'hybrid' firms, 94% do not comply with their firm's RTO policy.

Therefore, of the majority of firms that strongly suggest 2-3 days in the office, the result is 1-2 days a week in the office. The 20% of firms that are mandating 2-3 days a week in the office are achieving 2. The 7% of firms that are mandating 4+ days in the office are achieving 3, and the 7% of firms that have no policy are achieving less than 1 day a week, on average, in the office.

When firms cite the reasons they want attorneys back in the office, we noticed that for the first time, productivity is a main driver with 37.5% of firms citing this as an RTO priority. This surprised us. Almost all firms (92%) cited culture and mentorship (83%) and a small minority cited clients (14%).

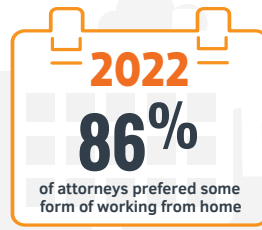
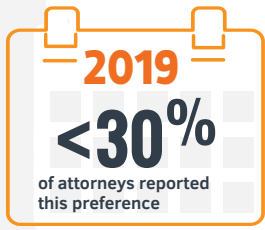
Looking closer, firms that mandated their RTO fared the worst and reported the highest rate of lack of compliance at 71%. Firms that strongly suggested their RTO policy fared much better, reporting over half (55.6%) of their attorneys do comply with the firm's RTO policy. This is a significant difference and is consistent with Thomson Reuters' findings that when firms mandated any kind of return to the office, even hybrid, those firms experienced heightened attorney attrition rates.²

Neither mandates nor suggestions – however strong – appear to give a fully satisfying answer to maximizing attorney days in the office, so we drilled into the effectiveness of the "new world" hybrid office amenities with which many firms are experimenting.

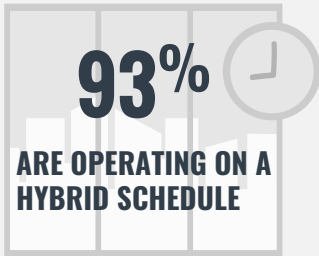
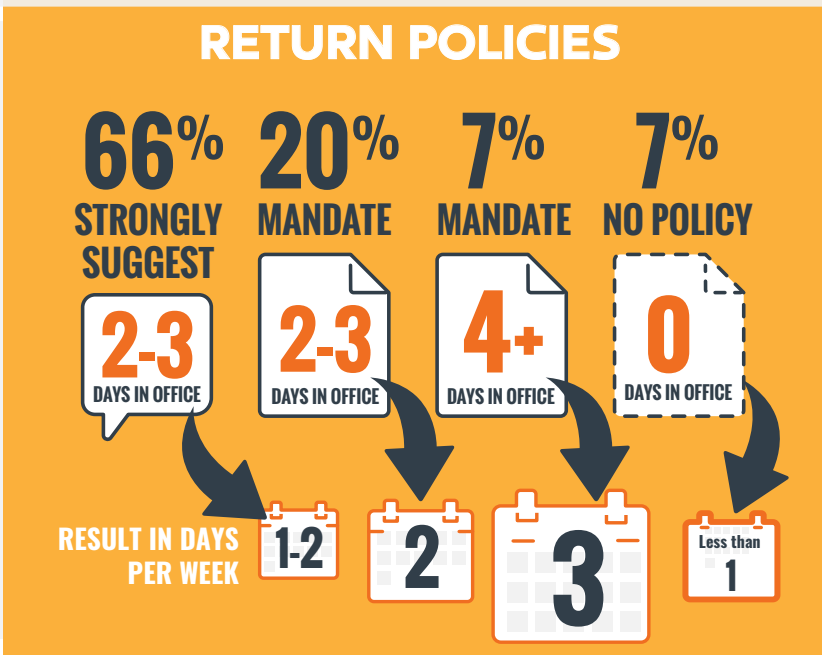
Of the 93% of firms that are now hybrid, 12% made no changes to real estate and did not add amenities or flexible workplace strategies. These firms' attorneys averaged 2 days a week in the office.

Of the 87.5% of firms that made at least one change or addition to their real estate, amenities, flexible workplace strategies — from adding baristas to wellness programs, workplace experience or redesigning floor plans — these firms' attorneys averaged 2.36 days in the office.

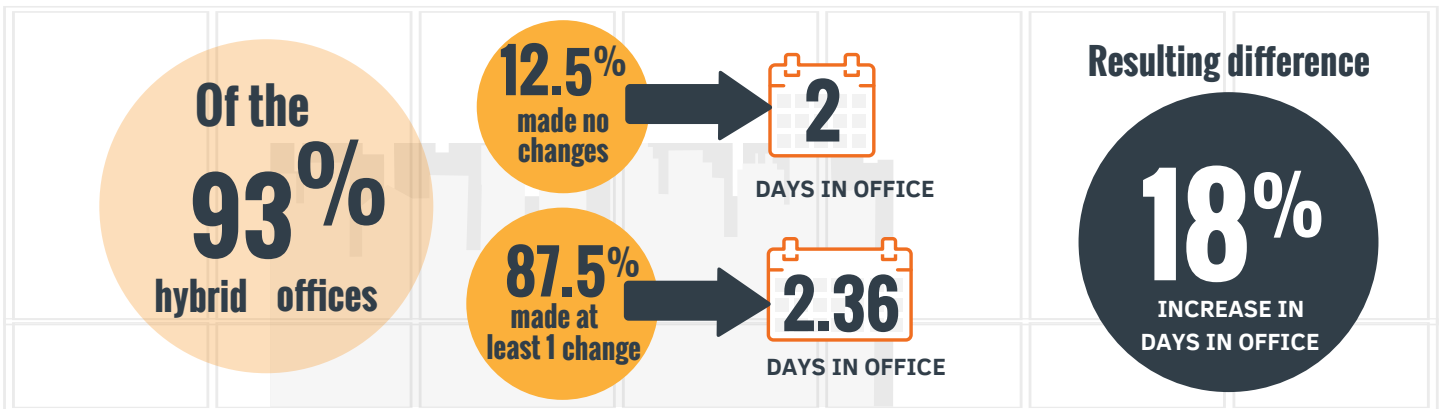
Overview



Law firm leaders agree the key factors of what makes a firm are:
Firm = Culture+Collaboration+Mentorship



CHANGES TO REAL ESTATE, AMENITIES, HOSPITALITY OR FLEXIBLE WORKPLACE



Redesigned floor space



2.40 **30** **6**
DAYS IN OFFICE DAYS PER YEAR WEEKS PER YEAR

Added amenities



2.30 **23** **5**
DAYS IN OFFICE DAYS PER YEAR WEEKS PER YEAR

Enhanced hospitality



2.35 **26** **5**
DAYS IN OFFICE DAYS PER YEAR WEEKS PER YEAR

Implemented hoteling



2.41 **30** **6**
DAYS IN OFFICE DAYS PER YEAR WEEKS PER YEAR

While this may at first appear to be an incremental difference, this is 18% or an extra 26 days a year, or 5 additional business weeks in the office. That's significant.

Let's dig in some more.

Of firms that redesigned their floor space (29%), these firms averaged 2.40 days in the office. This is a 21% increase over the average 2 days a week of 'non-changing firms' or an extra 30 days a year in the office, or 6 additional business weeks in the office.

Close behind this were firms that added amenities to their office which averaged 2.30 days in the office, 23 extra days a year or 5 business weeks.

Over a quarter of firms enhanced their hospitality by hiring workplace experience or concierge staff. These firms increased days in the office to an average 2.35 days or an extra 26 days per year or just over 5 business weeks.

More than half of firms started implementing some kind of hoteling and this actually increased days in the office to an average of 2.41 days to an extra 30 days per year or 6 business weeks.

Conclusions

Law firms have to earn their attorneys back into the office, and it's a combination of carrot and stick. While leadership may be driven to preserve culture, mentorship and productivity through maximizing in-office attorney time, mandates alone have a negative backlash of attorney attrition and the highest rates of non-compliance.

Rather, when law firm leaders apply a variety of "carrots" to incentivize attorneys back into the office, incremental success is gained that, over time, can deliver significant impact to what leaders want: culture, collaboration and mentorship. An additional 9 weeks of in-person time in the office can be game-changing.

Methodology

We surveyed and interviewed firms in the Am Law 100 and 200 in February and March of 2023 and received responses from approximately 20% of these top 200 law firms. The survey was delivered via email and responses

were collected via SurveyMonkey and interview narratives and were collected into the data reflected in this report. No responses were commissioned or solicited.

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