

## Size Matters: Small Firm With Big Shoes To Fill

By VALERIE KATZ

*Ed. note: This is the latest installment of [Size Matters](#), one of Above the Law's [new columns](#) for small-firm lawyers.*

I suppose that I should interview John Quinn (or [john quinn?](#)) on what it takes to start a successful small law firm. I mean, yeah, [Quinn Emanuel](#) was once small and now is [sort of](#)

[successful](#), but the reason for this interview would be because so many Quinn attorneys leave [to start their own practices](#).



I did not interview Quinn, though. Instead, I spoke to former Quinn attorneys turned small-firm superstars: Ryan Baker and Jaime Marquart, principals of [Baker Marquart LLP](#).

Baker and Marquart have been doing the small firm thing for nearly five years now, so they know of what they speak. And they both went to HLS and worked at Quinn for many years, so they are smarter than most of us.

Here is what they had to say....



Baker Marquart. Baker is fifth and Marquart is sixth from the left.

### What makes practicing at a small law firm enjoyable?

When you are at a small firm, you are working with your close friends. You feel as if you are truly part of a team or a family, as opposed to the feeling of being on an island that inevitably comes with Biglaw practice. And young attorneys get more meaningful experience early on in their development, as cases are staffed leanly.

### What makes practicing at Baker Marquart enjoyable?

We hand-selected the people here — it is a great group of people who are really smart and work hard and are also fun to be around. While we are not a lifestyle firm and we expect a lot from our attorneys, we strive to create a positive, even fun environment. We reward extraordinary effort. Our bonus structure compensates attorneys who go over the minimum hour requirement at a higher hourly rate. Also, we enjoy each other and socialize frequently with our co-workers and with our clients. Every Friday the entire office has lunch together; we also have semi-regular happy hours, and we have great holiday parties.

### What is the most challenging aspect of running a small firm?

Managing the firm's growth along with its culture. When you are at a firm of five or ten attorneys, every single hire makes an impact. We want to make sure that we grow the firm with attorneys who fit within the vision we have for the firm.

### What is the best way for a small law firm to get business?

Getting business is a combination of building relationships with other attorneys and clients and developing a strong reputation in the field. We had built a strong relationship with attorneys at Quinn, including John Quinn himself. When we went out on our own, we maintained that relationship and it has proven fruitful. The benefits of our relationship with Quinn have been mutual in some ways. Quinn is able to maintain a client relationship by referring matters that do not merit Quinn rates to a smaller firm they trust, and we benefit by getting the opportunity to build a new client relationship.

### How were you able to develop client relationships with Fortune 500 companies?

Start small. For instance, we have a Fortune 500 client that came to us to respond to a third-party subpoena. We are now on matter 26 for that client, including much larger matters than the matter for which we were initially engaged. The first matter for a large company, which is often smaller, is the greatest marketing opportunity. You do a good job and then the relationship develops from there.

### Has your opinion about small law firms changed since forming Baker Marquart?

We do not practice against other small law firms that often. But, being part of the community, we recognize that there are some bad lawyers at small firms (although that is certainly true of Biglaw as well). More often, however, we are impressed with the caliber of attorneys at small law firms. And, we have gotten past the Biglaw mentality where you assess the quality of an attorney based on his law school or law firm. Now, we read the brief to determine the quality of an opposing attorney.

### Should you hang a shingle right out of law school?

No. In most instances, to develop as an attorney, you need to learn from others. The institutional knowledge and resources of a large law firm are invaluable to new attorneys. Although it is certainly possible to start a practice right out of law school, in our experience the better path is to work hard for an established firm with a specific purpose in mind. Take advantage of that time to get the training and build the relationships that will serve you when you go on your own. Most firms and lawyers are very supportive of the decision of an attorney to start a firm.

### What sets Baker Marquart apart from other firms?

We have the same pedigree, client list and experience as Biglaw, but we have more reasonable rates and we are keenly focused on efficiency. In other words, we are a small firm that practices big law at small firm rates.

Here are a few other facts about Baker Marquart that makes me want to work there:

- Blake McCay, associate, is happy. He has gotten great experience working on sophisticated work. Only a few months into his career, Blake has appeared in court on several occasions.
- The previous two receptionists at Baker Marquart went to law school — clearly the people cannot be visibly miserable.
- They wear jeans to work.
- They are cool — Baker sent me an email as he was returning from backcountry helicopter snowboarding in Whistler.
- They have a summer associate program — this year they will hire two summers.
- The holiday parties are awesome. The last two years they invited everyone with a guest to Shutters on the Beach, followed by bottle service at a popular LA club.

[Baker Marquart](#) is always open to considering potential hires. While they value top credentials, they are not an absolute necessity. It is necessary that applicants have a desire to work hard and to build their own practice. To find out more about Baker Marquart, check out their [website](#).

Are you convinced yet that bigger is not better?

**Earlier:** [Adventures in Shingle Hanging: Two Quinn Associates Go Their Own Way](#)

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