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The Short List of Am Law 200 Firms Embracing Remote Lawyers Gets a Little Longer

By Jon Campisi
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What You Need to Know

- While many large law firms have since instituted return-to-office policies post-COVID, one firm in particular has hired a leader whose sole duty is to keep remote and office employees connected.
- Akerman claims that it is the first such Big Law firm to create such a role.
- But some experts say the position may exist, in practice but not name.

The pandemic may officially be a thing of the past, but hybrid and remote work in Big Law continues, and one firm in particular is recognizing that alternative work arrangements are likely here to stay, going as far as creating a new position to foster greater connectivity between employees regardless of where they're based.

Am Law 100 firm Akerman on Wednesday said it brought aboard its first-ever director of connections, Melody Burton, calling it the first leadership post of its kind in a major law



Courtesy photo

Melody Burton of Akerman

firm. It joins a short list of Am Law 200 firms—alongside Husch Blackwell and Fennemore Craig—that are dedicating personnel to supporting remote lawyers.

In her role, Burton is expected to be responsible for promoting connectivity, engagement, and a “sense of belonging” among its employees across all work arrangements, according to the firm.

Before coming to Akerman, Burton led her own global talent consultancy—Melody Burton Talent Management—for about eight years,

and before that she worked as a nonprofit HR consultant, as a global talent management consultant for Dentons, and in various roles with DLA Piper.

Burton could not be reached Thursday because she was traveling, but Akerman chairman and CEO Scott Meyers responded to questions about the new position.

“At Akerman, we don’t just accommodate flexibility—we operationalize connection,” Meyers said in written comments. “Melody’s role isn’t about where we work. It’s about how we lead, learn, and thrive—together.”

The firm said in a statement that in deciding to create a new leadership role focusing on connections, it was not simply a response to continued remote work, but rather was a strategic investment in how high-performing teams stay cohesive, engaged, and client-focused across any geography.

The firm stated that the new role enables it to push a high-trust, collaborative culture that leads to “great lawyering, sustained careers, and exceptional client outcomes.”

Meanwhile, several other brick-and-mortar firms are also continuing to place a high value on offering remote and hybrid work arrangements, while that model has simultaneously spurred the formation of many “distributed,” or fully virtual law firms, even post-COVID.

The fact that not just distributed firms, but a Big Law firm has actually embraced remote working is a good sign, said Christopher

Wilson, the managing director of Fennemore Forward, the remote work program at Second Hundred firm Fennemore Craig.

“That’s just really exciting,” Wilson said of Akerman’s decision to create a director of connections role. “For so long now, we’ve been reading about how most Big Law firms are trying to force their attorneys back into the office instead of recognizing that that might not be how some folks want to work.”

Embracing remote work is not enough, Wilson said, but rather firms like Akerman who are proactively creating leadership roles to help bring in-office and remote attorneys together are taking things a step further by truly recognizing that remote and hybrid work are likely here to stay.

“By seeing Akerman recognize how important it is to have somebody kind of overseeing that, like we do, it’s just exciting to see,” he said.

Am Law 100 firm Husch Blackwell has taken a similar approach. The firm maintains a virtual office called “The Link,” with equal billing to its more than 20 physical locations in the U.S., and a formal leadership structure that includes a office managing partner, a deputy, and an administrator.

Firms that have placed a high value on remote work may have a leg up when it comes to talent recruitment, some say, as the remote or hybrid option can be appealing to budding lawyers.

“Law firms are driven by their clients’ needs. They also face pressure around rising costs of real estate and they’re driven by their culture,” said Catherine Dapra, a partner with Baretz + Brunelle, a business and legal management consultancy.

These firms, Dapra said, “have certainly broadened the talent market that they can hire from.”

“Talent is the essence of the business of law, and talent brings [work] to the firm,” she said.

In addition to Husch Blackwell and Fennemore Craig, Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan maintains a policy that lets its U.S. lawyers work from anywhere. And late in 2024, Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe chief talent officer Siobhan Handley told *The American Lawyer* that the firm is willing to have full-time remote talent when family and other considerations make getting to an office difficult for prospective employees.

Dapra said her team, at *The American Lawyer’s* request, looked into Akerman’s claims of being the first to create a director

of connections role, and they were unable to find any other Big Law firms with such a position in their C-suite. However, she added, some firms may have similar positions, just by another name.

“It’s not the first time the industry has seen a structure around the necessities of which virtual talent should expect to remain a vital part of the firm community,” she said.

Firms that invest in business professionals to support a virtual infrastructure increases employee engagement and seems to help prevent any disruption in the delivery of legal services to clients, Dapra said.

As for Akerman, the decision to create a new leadership role whose sole purpose is to foster greater connection between in-office and remote employees stemmed from a recognition that remote work is now simply a part of life, and employees still need the tools, culture and support to do their jobs from wherever they may be working.

“This isn’t performative,” Meyers said. “It’s transformative.”