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The Law Firm Merger Diaries: Forming Measurable Ties

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What goes on behind the scenes before and after a law firm merger announcement? As the pace of mergers picks up, this Law360 [Expert Analysis series](#) explores strategies for effectively navigating various aspects of the process, with insights from practitioners at firms that have recently merged.

In this installment, Troutman Pepper Locke LLP Managing Partner Amie Colby stresses the importance of intentional relationship-building in the merger process, and how an early, structured approach can yield measurable success, following [Troutman Pepper Hamilton Sanders LLP's merger](#) with Locke Lord LLP a year ago.

Successful law firm mergers are often built on compatible practices, financial alignment and similar cultures. But the real work comes with bringing people together early enough, and with enough structure, to create the relationships that will drive collaboration.

That process shouldn't wait for the merger to close. It needs to begin as soon as the possibility of a combination is on the table.

At our first Troutman Pepper Locke partner retreat in September 2025, I shared a number that captured the room's attention. Only nine months after our merger, 86% of our top 100 clients were being served by attorneys from both legacy firms.

This did not happen by chance. It was the result of more than a year of intentional effort to bring people together, build trust and create structures for collaboration.

For us, it was proof that the merger wasn't just about combining headcounts or practice groups. It was about integrating teams in a way that directly benefited our clients.

With two major mergers in the last five years, we have learned several lessons about what it really takes to bring people together — lessons that may help other firms chart their own course.

Starting Early

When Troutman Sanders and Pepper Hamilton [merged](#) in 2020, the pandemic forced us to navigate integration

through computer screens. Partners and teams who would normally spend time getting to know one another in person had to build trust virtually.

While we ultimately succeeded in uniting the firm, we also saw how difficult it was to create real connection without the benefit of shared, in-person experiences.

That merger taught us an important lesson: Build relationships before the deal closes. In the early days of merger discussions, people are already looking for signs of what the future will feel like, and whether it will truly be one firm or just two groups under a shared name.

With that in mind, when Troutman Pepper and Locke Lord announced in April 2024 that we were considering a merger, we did not wait to start the integration process. Over the summer, we brought hundreds of partners from both firms together in more than 80 meetings, deliberately creating opportunities for connection before a formal vote was even held.

If we could have brought together even more people, we would have. Every meeting built familiarity, trust and momentum that made the merger feel real before it was official.

These conversations helped establish not only a shared vision for the combined firm but also personal connections that supported collaboration from day one.

Creating Purposeful Connection

One of the easiest mistakes in any merger is assuming that if you simply put people together, collaboration will follow. However, new colleagues may hesitate to reach out, unsure of the right way to connect or whom to connect with in the larger organization.

That is why we believed integration could not be left to chance. It had to be guided with structure and purpose.

Throughout 2024 and into 2025, we built intentional forums where partners could not only meet but also work together on shared business goals. Each of our pre-merger collaboration meetings had a structure, where partners learned more about each other and their practices and worked together to identify growth opportunities.

These meetings were supported by our business development and practice management teams, who translated those discussions into formal growth plans for our practices. One of the many benefits of these numerous meetings was that it sparked strong engagement from our partners who looked for ways to collaborate across firms before the merger was finalized.

Our integration efforts also extended to our professional staff. We began connecting administrative teams across functions — from finance and operations to talent and IT — so they could start planning together and aligning their approaches.

This not only accelerated the operational transition but also gave professionals in every role a chance to feel part of the new firm from the beginning.

The lesson was clear: Don't just hope integration will happen; create intentional pathways for it. Whether through structured meetings, collaborative workshops, or cross-team projects, a framework helps make connections natural and productive.

Communicating Through Change

Integration depends not only on structure and opportunity but also on communication. During our 2025 merger, we made communication a strategic pillar of change management. We wanted to keep people informed, confident and focused on collaboration rather than uncertainty.

We built a data-driven communication strategy that met people where they were. Using a mix of traditional updates, internal platforms and AI-enabled tools, we delivered timely answers to common questions about systems, processes and next steps.

Dashboards and analytics helped us see what information teams were looking for most, allowing us to anticipate needs and adjust messaging quickly.

This approach reduced confusion and built trust. When people understand what's happening and how to find answers to their questions, they have more space to focus on what matters most: working together to serve clients.

Measuring Success Through Clients

At the end of the day, the real test of integration is not how many meetings you hold or how many retreats you organize. Success comes when lawyers are working together in ways that matter for clients.

Culture and connection are essential, but for law firm leaders, the most tangible measure of success is client outcomes.

For us, that proof came in the data. Our metrics show that all of our top 100 clients are being served by multiple practice groups, and nearly all are being served across legacy firm lines.

That is measurable collaboration. We have also seen increases in cross-firm pitches, new client relationships, and growth with existing clients.

These numbers matter because they confirm what we had hoped to achieve: intentional integration of teams translating into stronger collaboration for clients.

The lesson is clear. If you build the structures that help your people connect and collaborate, your clients will benefit.

Closing

Mergers are complex. They involve countless decisions about structure, systems and strategy. But in our

experience after two mergers in five years, what ultimately determines success is whether people come together as one firm.

That does not happen automatically. It takes foresight, planning and steady leadership that keeps people connected to a shared purpose.

Our approach was to start early, involve as many partners as possible, and create structures that guided collaboration. Along the way, we saw the cultural benefits of stronger relationships and deeper trust.

But what truly validated the effort was seeing clients respond, with more joint engagements, more growth, and more confidence in what we could deliver together.

For firm leaders facing the challenge of integrating teams after a merger, the lesson is simple: Don't leave connection to chance. Build it into the process from day one, and keep reinforcing it at every opportunity.

The result is more than just a unified firm culture, it is a platform for lasting client success.

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