



## RECRUITING AND RETAINING THE BEST LEGAL TALENT IN THE WORLD

*From Cobra's inception in 2007, its commitment and careful attention to building the best team has been the foundation of the company's success and standing within the legal industry. Twelve years later, in a highly competitive alternative legal services provider market, Cobra's team continues to deliver and delight its clients. As a result, Cobra in 2019 has more than doubled in size and finding and keeping a great staff is even more critical.*

*Cobra's team is comprised of highly-motivated, dedicated and talented individuals from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Cobra's team of attorneys, 70% of whom are women, are carefully chosen from the top law schools. Nearly 10% of the team has been with Cobra for over a decade and 30% have been with Cobra for at least 5 years. We posed some questions to our colleagues Sakhivel Venkatraman, Managing Director – India and Vice President of Global Administration, and Nithya Chandar, Senior General Manager – Human Resources, about how we build the best team in the business*

### ***How do you identify the right person for Cobra? What are you looking for in a candidate?***

We started out with a very specific hiring process designed to find people who would thrive in our culture, and that process has evolved over the twelve years we have been serving our clients (as the LPO industry has matured and we have faced more competition for great candidates.)

Our first step is, of course, screening. We are always looking for lawyers with a drive for providing excellence and value for our clients, with a strong academic and/or work background. We look for lawyers at all experience levels as we understand not every job requires decades of experience, but often do have the need for deep expertise. Cobra highly values in-house legal experience as many of our clients are in-house counsel at large companies. Even at the very early stages, we rely heavily on recommendations and welcome candidates who are already known to and respected by someone already employed by Cobra.

Typically, resumes are screened for qualification in law from recognized universities. Candidates must be graduates of an accredited 3- or 5-year law program. We also look at candidates who are in their final academic year and consider their applications subject to their

clearing final exams. Although we encourage candidates with work experience, it is not mandatory to have held a legal position to be considered for a Cobra role.

Once the initial screening is done, the applicants take a test modeled on the LSAT that tests their general and legal aptitude, research and writing skills. In addition to the online test, the candidates are also put through a brief assignment in contracts management. The candidates who clear the tests proceed to the next stage in the recruitment cycle, which is the personal interview. Naturally we carefully verify credentials (academic and past work experience) of each candidate who makes it to the interview stage.

Each candidate shortlisted through our hiring tests appears before a panel of three Cobra team members for an interactive interview. The candidate is encouraged to speak openly about background, goals, and why they are interested in joining Cobra. This interaction, though brief, is nevertheless valuable as it gives the panel members insight into the candidate's overall skills and potential. Quintessentially, the right candidate for Cobra is someone who reflects a positive outlook and has high core values. The panel members, while seeking the best people for Cobra, care about helping these young lawyers make appropriate career choices - in other words, we consider the panel interview to be more than just a recruitment exercise.

***We are growing and taking on very large projects. That means speed counts in choosing and on-boarding new attorneys. How do you tackle that, especially when you may be recruiting, selecting and training lots of people at one time?***

You have hit on a very timely point. We are at a crucial juncture for Cobra, with so much growth so quickly. But - that is what our human resources team has been anticipating and we are ready! Witnessing Cobra's phenomenal growth in size and capacity has been the most exciting phase for Cobra's senior staff who have been with the company since its inception.

Our long-standing relationships with law schools, along with referrals from current team members, have made it possible to onboard new attorneys quickly. The law schools extend to us a helping hand in organizing campus tests. This allows large numbers of students to take the tests at one time. Our strong rapport with the law schools makes it possible for us to translate our resource requirements to them easily, and they help us reach out to a large student pool, including their alumni.

We are especially proud of our training for new hires, as we seek to introduce many new lawyers at one time to the LPO industry. We have developed general training modules on the fundamentals of document review, contracts management and legal research. Our project managers work with clients and their outside counsel and offer customized modules for particular matter requirements. The training is extensive but compressed into an onboarding period - we find that works well, because while their school experiences and the training we offer are essential to success, for most lawyers around the world (really, for most professions) the best possible way to learn is on-the-job with close oversight and supervision.

***Give us an example of a recent recruiting experience that went well, and why?***

During our recent experience with campus hiring, we were able to look at a wide scope of law schools and identify abundant talent for hire. There is great potential in this generation of graduates, as they possess technical skills and are much faster adapting to the work and the technology, we use than our recruits from a decade ago.

Recently we were able to hire an attorney with over twenty years of experience in a matter of weeks - she was referred to us by one of our trusted project manager attorneys who understood our requirements and expectations. That's the power of referrals.

***People seem to stick with Cobra once they start. What explains Cobra's excellent retention rate for its attorneys and staff?***

Cobra's leadership team believes in investing in people and building and mentoring them to higher positions within the organization. The senior attorneys and management team have all completed a decade or more at Cobra. This, in itself, is a testament to their strong faith in and unrelenting commitment to Cobra.

But it isn't just at the senior level. Cobra believes in an all-encompassing work culture where all of its people are given due attention and care. First and foremost, we expect and enforce respect in the workplace. For example, Cobra regularly spearheads sessions on harassment and a respectful workplace.

We do charity work together - Cobra supports the cause of differently-abled citizens, organizing sports meets and events for them. As a group, Cobra's team members show a great inclination to give back to society in some way and strive to be responsible global citizens.

Another thing I'll mention is the internal effort to cross-train. Several training plans and programs are initiated by senior team members each month, which are great platforms for knowledge exchange.

***What are the first six months like in the life of a new Cobra attorney?***

All new hires complete the joining formalities, which include signed offer letters, non-disclosure agreements (we take our clients' security and confidential information extremely seriously) and forms for technology access. Once this is complete, the new employees are put through a pretty typical human resources orientation, consisting of an overview about Cobra, its vision, policies and procedures, and information security awareness training. During the first six months, these new hires are acquainted with our corporate culture, sharpen their communication skills and are trained for other lines of work at Cobra. We offer training modules geared towards the type of work the new hires will be doing, including client-specific training.

***What advice would you have for attorneys seeking to work for Cobra, or for any so-called "alternative legal service provider"? What are the benefits? What are the disadvantages, if any, that they should consider?***

Cobra offers a solid training platform for what we call "freshers" who want to explore the corporate legal world. This kind of alternative career is a paradigm shift in the legal arena, as it opens doors for law graduates who do not want to work in courtrooms and are looking for something unique and rewarding.

Cobra hires full-time and part-time employees and contractors depending on the client's or Cobra's need. However, no matter what type of engagement with Cobra, Cobra treats all of its employees and partners as part of the Cobra team.

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### **About Cobra Legal Solutions**

Cobra Legal Solutions and CobrATX were formed over a decade ago to help you derive higher value from your legal functions. Cobra Legal Solutions is a diverse team of like-minded professionals with deep experience in both corporate legal departments and law firms united with one common goal: to improve the efficiency of legal support services. We combine our expertise in eDiscovery, contracts and due diligence, document review, legal research, and technology to deliver consistent, measurable results for our clients. Through a Value Sourcing approach and judicious use of technology assistance, we can significantly reduce the cost and risk in the business of law.

More information is available at our site [www.cobralegalsolutions.com](http://www.cobralegalsolutions.com).