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Spencer Fane's growth spurt accelerates in a flat legal market

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Kansas City-based Spencer Fane LLP is coming off yet another year of impressive growth, with revenue up 24 percent and income up 28 percent in 2017.

That comes on top of a good 2016, when the law firm's revenue rose 15.5 percent and income grew 17.2 percent. It's even more impressive considering that it's happening in an overall legal market that has seen stagnant growth the past 10 years.

Chairman Pat Whalen said the firm's success is driven by focusing on providing clients with solid value and a solid talent proposition.

"We're focused on client-centered growth that is aligned with our culture and values and that is financially sustainable," Whalen said. "We look at those three things whenever we're looking at adding a new group, making a lateral hire or entering a new market."

Adding lateral hires as a growth strategy can be fraught with pitfalls. Studies show that the success rate for keeping those lateral hires for longer than two years is only a 50-50 proposition. But Spencer Fane puts a huge focus on hiring only true believers in the firm's culture of constantly driving efficiency and value for clients. That's led it to retain 100 percent of the partners who have joined in the past five years.

"I always say when we're recruiting that the worst thing is not failing to attract a person," Whalen said. "The worst thing would be actually hiring a person who doesn't fit the culture and isn't happy at the firm. So we have a high level of transparency about our systems and our culture upfront."

Whalen said he's also interested in adding attorneys who see the value in collaboration. Spencer Fane doesn't just bring in new people and forget about them. It en-



Spencer Fane continues to grow in a flat legal landscape.



Pat Whalen, chairman of Kansas City-based Spencer Fane LLP

sure that those new hires are fully integrated into the nationwide network of offices that stretch from Phoenix to St. Louis and Omaha to Dallas. The firm constantly assesses integration and collaboration.

"It's natural for a lot of organizations as they grow to lose some of their cultural history and bonds," Whalen said. "But we

monitor that and assess it. We're proactive in ensuring we get a good match for our firm at the front end and then once they're in the system that they become fully integrated and have everything they need to be collaborative."

Whalen said collaboration allows Spencer Fane to offer a higher level of service and expertise in markets where it may have fewer attorneys than its competitors, and it ensures that the firm stays top of mind for all different types of legal issues a client might need help with. That, in turn, keeps lawyers listening to clients, enabling the firm to quickly adapt and keep growing.

"Everything we've accomplished has been based on having strong lines of communication with clients," Whalen said. "If you're not constantly listening to clients, then you don't know the road map for growth. You don't know if a client is thinking about increasing their operations in Denver or Phoenix or Springfield or wherever, and what kinds of needs they'll have there. So that's where my focus will be this year."