

## Kirkland & Ellis

[Joann Chang]

Tops among Chicago firms, Kirkland & Ellis has a reputation for getting the best work - and the best associates.

As the most prestigious of the Chicago law firms, Kirkland & Ellis continues to demonstrate its regional and national dominance in litigation and corporate law matters. More than 125 years ago, Stewart G. Shepard and Robert R. McCormick created the firm and, to this day, have had a greater impact than its current name implies. Specifically, McCormick's later role as publisher of his family's newspaper, *The Chicago Tribune*, led to the firm's historic work on free speech that established its fame. Partners Kirkland and Ellis subsequently made their mark on the firm by working in defense of the *Tribune* and other prominent newspapers in various libel cases.

These days, the firm of over 1000 lawyers receives press for its representation of Fortune 500 companies. *Corporate Counsel Magazine* ranked Kirkland & Ellis fourth in a survey of top choices for outside counsel and first for its litigation team. In the past year, Kirkland & Ellis attorneys have worked with S.C. Johnson on its acquisition of German corporation Bayer, Consec on its dispute over Donald Trump's shares of the New York GM building, and General Motors on its defense of trademark infringement claims. Among its top litigators, Kirkland & Ellis also boasts famous Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr whose career will perhaps remain forever linked with the Clinton administration.

The determined attitude with which Kirkland & Ellis approaches its trade often bleeds into its workplace environment. Serious work and long hours are expected by associates and partners alike. Associates easily clock in

over 2,000 billable hours per year at this firm and those who cannot pull their weight are quickly weeded out. Social interactions are minimal and associates state that they prefer spending their spare time with family and their outside lives. Whether the firm has selectively chosen exceptionally motivated and independent attorneys or has internally bred this type of work ethic, associates at Kirkland & Ellis are well-suited to the environment and find great professional satisfaction here.

While encouraging self-reliance, Kirkland & Ellis does not leave its associates without excellent training. The law firm has two highly renowned training programs, the Kirkland Institute for Trial Advocacy (KITA) and the Kirkland Institute of Corporate Practice (KICP). Both programs hold two sessions, one for summer associates and the other for first years. Associates participate in videotaped mock trials or mock negotiations that are supervised and later critiqued by senior partners. Although the rigorous training may sound intimidating for some, most associates find it extremely useful and rank Kirkland as having one of the nation's best lawyer training programs.

While reputed to exclusively favor the top ten law schools, Kirkland & Ellis also considers local sources for talent. Graduates from Harvard Law and Pepperdine University alike frequently make up the summer associates program. Besides stellar grades, attorneys with plenty of energy and strong independent qualities have the best chances of getting hired and making it at this firm. Additionally, Kirkland & Ellis' two tier partnership system,

equity and non-equity levels, rewards its hard and loyal workers. Making it to the non-equity level is reported to be a reasonable expectation after six years and the firm provides candid evaluations at regular intervals. Though achieving the more desirable and more financially rewarding equity partnership is near impossible, associates nonetheless appreciate the near guarantee of making it to some level of partnership.

Kirkland & Ellis has a single compensation plan for its associates and compensates equally, regardless of office location. The firm's standardized salaries begin at \$125,000 for all its first-years, but London associates get an additional \$30,000 to help defray the cost of living increase. And although bonuses have been lacking in recent years due to the recession, the firm generally provides a \$10,000 summer stipend for its first years, as well as merit-based bonuses for its associates. The firm also supplies a generous benefits package which includes stipends for judicial clerkship experiences, paid moving expenses, and three weeks of vacation.

### Jobs

**Kirkland & Ellis currently has several openings in all of its domestic offices, including opportunities for experienced real estate, litigation and corporate associates. More information regarding attorney positions at Kirkland & Ellis can be found in the LawCrossing job database.**