



ATTORNEY SEARCH

by Stephen Seckler

**Book Review: America's Greatest Places to Work with a Law Degree and How To Make The Most of Any Job, No Matter Where It Is!, Kimm Walton, 1999, Harcourt Legal and Professional Publications, 1,146 pages**

*America's Greatest Places to Work with a Law Degree* starts with a disclaimer. Kimm Walton writes, "I don't take direction well. That's why I was fired from every job I ever had". She goes on to say that the people in the firm she worked for in her second year of law school were "miserable schmucks."

One might conclude from this introduction that what follows is a book with lots of sarcasm and little substance. But do not be misled by the author's irreverent and humorous writing style. This volume is packed with more than 1,000 pages of useful information on traditional and non-traditional legal employers.

*America's Greatest Places to Work with a Law Degree* is a great reference volume for any lawyer in career transition or any law student trying to chart out a career path. There are chapters on finding good government jobs, public interest jobs, and jobs with trade associations. There are special chapters on finding one of the ultimate dream jobs in sports, entertainment, and in a number of other sexy industries.

The largest section of the book contains profiles of law firms. These are major firms that have tried to do things differently. Each profile contains basic background information on the firm (specialties, clients, etc.) and a description of "What it's like to work there."

Other chapters in the book have profiles of less traditional legal employers. Walton also includes chapters on how to make the most of any job and how to find jobs that are not listed in the book. (She comments that many of the "best" jobs are at small firms that are too small to be included in a national directory.)

This is Walton's second major undertaking in the area of attorney career guidance. Her first work, *Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams*, is a national bestseller. Walton, who herself quit the practice of law, also writes a column for the *National Law Journal* called "Dear Job Goddess" (a kind of Dear Abby for attorneys seeking employment). When she is not writing, she spends a portion of her time traveling the country as a motivational speaker.

Walton has chosen an interesting methodology for her research. Rather than directly surveying associates, partners, in-house counsel, and lawyers working in non-legal positions (an awesome undertaking), she chose to speak with law school administrators. At the start of the book, she includes three pages of acknowledgments, listing all of the administrators who contributed their thoughts (She also acknowledges the help of the many

others who asked to remain anonymous.). In other words, she has clearly done a lot of homework.

The author emphasizes that each individual must decide for him/herself what makes for a “great” job. Nonetheless, she identifies 19 qualities that are present in a good working environment (factors that have come up repeatedly in her discussions with lawyers). They include: 1) the employer matches or beats your idea of what work would be like; 2) the work is intellectually challenging; 3) the hours are livable (or at least better than you thought), you have control over your scheduling, and supervisors are sympathetic when you put in long hours; 4) you receive tokens of appreciation from your employer; 5) you feel that your work is meaningful; 6) you play a significant role in the work; 7) the compensation system is consistent with your values (whether lockstep or eat what you kill); 8) there are no artificial deadlines; 9) the employer respects you personally; 10) you know where you stand; 11) supervisors are available to answer questions; 12) supervisors share expertise with you; 13) you have lots of responsibility early; 14) you enjoy the people with whom you spend the most time; 15) the organization is family friendly; 16) you receive direct client contact ;17) the support staff is happy; 18) whatever you are doing is setting you up for what you want to do next; and 19) the city where you live gives you the chance to contribute to the community.

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One can certainly find fault in Walton’s methodology (i.e., law school administrators may have their own biases even though they speak with hundreds of law students and practicing attorneys), but she presents a convincing case why her method of gathering information is less prone to bias than directly soliciting input from attorneys about their jobs.

Walton is an optimist. She boldly states, “I’ll prove to you that you can take your law degree and have a great life, doing work you truly enjoy.” Her basic premise is that the country is full of amazing jobs, even in large firms that belie the sweatshop image. And she has plenty of anecdotal evidence to prove it.

Walton also provides some tips on how to spot the telltale signs of a bad workplace (i.e., when you are checking out an opportunity). She includes looking at the partner-to-associate ratio, looking at the retention rate of associates, and observing how much laughter and happiness there seems to be when walking around the hallways.

*America’s Greatest Places to Work with a Law Degree* is filled with practical career advice. While overall, this is a great resource for law students and attorneys alike, the only criticism is that it is perhaps too ambitious in trying to serve as a national reference title. For example, despite the great bulk of material, attorneys in Massachusetts will only find six entries of employers in Massachusetts, and none of them is a major law firm headquartered in Boston. This is noteworthy because Boston firms did very well in the *American Lawyer’s* 1998 Survey of Mid-level Associates. According to the survey, 7 of the top 20 firms were located in the Hub.

Nonetheless, Walton is not trying to create a national ranking system, and she openly admits that there may be employers who were omitted and deserve to be included in the next edition of the book. Furthermore, reading profiles from some of the employers in other cities will give a reader some idea of what to look for and what questions to ask. In short, *America’s Greatest Places to Work with a Law Degree* is a very worthwhile purchase. It just weighs a lot