



ATTORNEY SEARCH

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How to Select the Best Legal Recruiter and Maximize the Effectiveness of Working with One

INTRODUCTION

One of the most misunderstood facets of the legal recruiting industry is the following: You have many options when choosing a legal recruiter (not just the one that cold-called you), and how well you work with your legal recruiter will directly influence how successful the legal recruiter is in working with you.

If you have ever spent any serious time in Hollywood, you have undoubtedly come across numerous people with agents. When you speak to someone with an agent, they often talk about things they told their agents:

"I told my agent I do not like this kind of part because of X."

"My agent says that if I wait about six months, a part with X may open up."

"My agent knows my personal obligations and is not going to allow me to work with X director because he is too demanding."

Similarly, the more time you spend with someone with an agent, the more you realize that he or she is communicating with that agent all the time. Frankly, if any of these people with agents are your friends, it can get pretty annoying. Their cell phones are ringing during lunch with calls from the agents. They need to call their agents during a night out--and so on. If you go to any social functions with your friends who have agents, the agents are very likely to be there talking to their clients.

The reason we tell you all of this is that in the entertainment industry, the people with agents have figured out that the more they communicate with their agents, the more likely they will find their perfect match to advance their careers. But it is not all work. The client and agent also establish a working and friendly relationship where the agent constantly knows about what is going on with their client, both personally and professionally.

In the legal industry, there are a few select attorneys (less than 1%) whose skills are good enough that they need agents--just like famous actors and actresses do. Admittedly, the legal recruiting industry is much different from Hollywood; however, in both cases the agents and legal recruiters are working with people who, if they are not stars, have a tremendous amount of potential. The job of a legal recruiter is to sell your potential to law firms.

If you have worked with a recruiter in the past, you likely have a pretty good idea of how the process works. If you haven't yet worked with a recruiter, the idea of "placing your career in somebody's hands" may seem rather daunting and scary. Regardless of which category you fall into, it is important to know that if you are able to use a legal recruiter, our goals are the same: To help you get a job where you and the firm will both be happy. In this regard, here are some ways you can ensure that you choose the best recruiter and ensure that you maximize the effectiveness of working with your recruiter.

How to Select the Best Legal Recruiter and Maximize the Effectiveness of Working with One

1. HOW TO SELECT THE BEST LEGAL RECRUITER FOR YOUR NEEDS

You do not need to use the first recruiter who calls you. There are a plethora of recruiters to choose from regarding your search for a better opportunity. And all are not created equal. We are amazed by how often attorneys decide to place their careers in a virtually unknown recruiter's hands just because a particular recruiter was the first to cold call them about an opportunity. Often, when we ask attorneys the names of their former recruiters, they frequently respond to the effect of, "I don't even remember the person's name" or "I only spoke to the person once, and they forwarded my resume to a bunch of places, and I never heard back from them."

It is important to realize that just because a particular recruiter calls you, that does not mean that he or she is the only person working on the search for a law firm. Unless the recruiter has an "exclusive" on the search, it is likely that numerous recruiters are working on the search, and you definitely have a choice as to whom you want to work with. Similar to buying a house, you do not need to work with the first real estate agent whom you come in contact with. And feel free to "interview" multiple recruiters as well.

How do you determine the best legal recruiter for you? Now that you understand that there are numerous options when choosing a recruiter, here are some things you should consider.

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First, do you feel comfortable speaking to the recruiter about your ideal job and career dreams? Do you feel that the recruiter is interested in getting to know you and your most important priorities, or is the recruiter merely trying to "sell" you on the particular job he or she is calling about?

Second, is the recruiter reputable? Is the recruiter with an established company that you can easily research? Can you research the individual recruiter's educational and professional background?

Third, does the recruiter spend a significant amount of his or her practice "cold calling?" This is an important consideration for the following reason. If a recruiter cold calls attorneys all day, this recruiter must have certain firms that he or she "places in" and some that he or she "calls into." Firms will not work with recruiters that cold call into them because this is considered "double dipping" and is highly frowned upon. Thus, if a recruiter calls into half of the firms in a city (and these firms are obviously not firms that the recruiter can make placements in), the recruiter has access to only half of the opportunities in the given city. On the other hand, if the recruiter does not spend much time cold calling and works off of referrals or candidates initiating contact, this recruiter will have access to many more opportunities.

Fourth, if you are searching in a particular region of the country, be sure to confirm that the recruiter has experience working in this region. For example, if you are moving from New York to Charlotte, most likely the New York recruiter is focused on the tri-state region, while the recruiter who is based in the southeast region will have a much better idea of what jobs are available in the specific market. Indeed, law firms seem to have preferences working with recruiters that are either based in their geographic region or have a lot of experience working with attorneys in their particular regions. This is because law firms appreciate developing long-term, productive relationships with recruiters. Given the significant amount of time it takes to monitor opportunities and develop relationships with law firms, it is literally impossible for a single recruiter to be able to cover the entire nation. If a recruiter suggests that he or she can cover the entire nation, don't walk, RUN, for the hills.

Fifth, a referral from a fellow attorney is a great way to find a recruiter. If somebody you know and trust has had a positive experience with a particular recruiter in the past, this fact should be given substantial weight.

Candidates Who Work With One Recruiter Typically Have the Most Success and the Least Chance of Getting "Bounced" as a Result of Dual Submissions. While you are certainly free to use as many recruiters as you want, and it may seem tempting to have several different recruiters "cover the market," it is common knowledge in the industry that candidates who work with one recruiter have an overwhelmingly higher rate of success than those that use several recruiters.

There are some definite benefits of working with just one recruiter. As an initial matter, working with one recruiter eliminates the possibility of a "double submission." More often than you'd like to think, attorneys who use multiple recruiters often do not keep the best notes or records of where they have applied in the past six months. (The

six-month period is the industry standard for determining who has “priority.” In other words, if you or a recruiter submitted your materials to a firm on January 1st, another recruiter should not submit you to that same firm until, at the least, after June 1st).

In these situations, there is a heightened risk that you may inadvertently authorize two recruiters to submit you to the same firm within a six-month period. If this happens, even if you have stellar credentials and your experience is right on target, a firm will reject you for two reasons. First, the firm will do anything to avoid getting into a fee dispute with two separate recruiting companies and will find it much easier to reject the candidate (remember, this same rationale applies if you apply to a firm directly on your own and then to the same firm through a recruiter within a six-month period). Also, if a submission is received from two different sources, it sends the signal that the candidate is either disorganized or somewhat desperate for a job.

Furthermore, working with one recruiter allows you to have a consistent coach, confidant, and cheerleader in your corner at all times and one who can help keep you “on track” in light of your stated goals and priorities. We have also found that you will likely feel more comfortable “opening up” and providing a greater deal of information if you have a solid relationship with one recruiter. We urge you not to underestimate this point as it is crucial to the process.

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Here’s an important example: if a recruiter knows about all of your different interviews, he or she can often use the information to generate and maintain interest from various firms. Furthermore, firms are more likely to actively pursue a candidate when a recruiter appears to have thoroughly screened the candidate and is fully aware of the ins and outs of a candidate’s situation.

In short, like an agent, the more information a recruiter has, the better he or she is able to expertly “survey” your job landscape, keep you on track, and effectively manage and coordinate your search with you to make sure it is as smooth as possible and attains your career goals.

Once you have selected a recruiter, what should he/she be doing to assist with your search? The recruiter you work with should always write a detailed cover letter on your behalf to the firms. The cover letter should discuss, at a minimum:

- Why you are considering a move;
- Your interest in the specific firm;
- Your academic achievements;
- A highly detailed description of your work experience (which goes beyond what is merely in your resume);
- Why you have made certain job changes in the past, with provided explanations;
- Any special accolades or characteristics that may set you apart from your peers; and
- Any other relevant personal information.

We strongly believe that one of the biggest advantages of using a recruiter is that a recruiter can tell your story in a unique way, brag on your behalf (without you appearing conceited), and—most of all—answer any questions that somebody reviewing your resume might have at first blush (e.g., Why is the person looking? Why did he/she leave the last job after only one year? Why did he/she get two C’s during the last semester of law school?). In fact, we feel so strongly that a comprehensive cover letter is crucial to your candidacy that we do not present any candidates without at least a several-page cover letter.

Many recruiting coordinators have privately confessed that they routinely reject candidates when their submissions do not have explanations about certain potential “yellow flags.” Often, a mere explanation can make all the difference. In the words of one recruiting coordinator at a very well-regarded firm, “It is amazing how, when we have so many resumes and need to narrow our pile, we just reject flat-out those candidates that don’t have explanations for all our questions and interview those that do.”

Importantly, telling your story verbally does little to help your candidacy in the long run. Although maybe the recruiting coordinator or one partner may have the explanation, odds are that the other 5 or 6 people reviewing your resume will not be privy to the same explanation and could easily draw adverse conclusions because of their lack of information.

Many recruiters, unfortunately, are focused primarily on sending out as many submissions as possible to increase their individual chances of making just one placement and, therefore, spend a minimum amount of time on submissions. If a recruiter merely emails or faxes a resume to a firm with little or no background information, you are losing out on perhaps the biggest advantage of using a recruiter. In those cases, you would likely be better off just sending your resume yourself.

Lastly, your recruiter should ask you for a deal sheet or significant transactions sheet if you are a corporate, securities, real estate, or tax attorney. If you are a litigator, you should provide the recruiter with a couple of writing samples. The recruiter should have examples of deal sheets, depending on your practice area, to assist with your detailed transaction list. The writing sample should be something recent and almost entirely your own work product. After you have done a full read through on your writing samples, your recruiter should offer to read your writing sample before he/she submits you to the firm. We have found that about 90% of the candidates who submit writing samples have at least one typo. That grammatical error or spelling mistake can make or break your candidacy with a firm when you are competing against another attorney of equal qualifications, personality, and experience. It also helps to have a recruiter who either was a former attorney or has worked in a law firm review your writing sample or review your deal sheet. These individuals are most familiar with the work product that partners and associates are interested in reviewing and will understand, if applicable, how to make your deal sheet or writing sample better.

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2. NOW THAT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT RECRUITER, HERE ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN MAXIMIZE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THAT RECRUITER

Help Us Get to Know You, Not Only as an Attorney, but as a Person. We strongly believe that the better we know you, the more effective we are in helping with your needs. As recruiters, we came into this profession because we love working with and helping people. Almost all of our recruiters are attorneys who left practicing law because they simply preferred talking to fellow attorneys about their careers and issues that were more personal in nature. Talking to people is our passion, and if it weren't, we would not be able to spend hours upon hours speaking to and helping you with one of the most important transitions in your life. While we certainly need to know your "professional story" (e.g., why you are looking for a new position, your professional experience, etc.), we also enjoy getting to know you as a person as well. For example, what do you like the most in your practice? The least? Why did you decide to practice law? Why are you continuing to practice law? Who is your inspiration? Were you the first person in your family to attend law school? What makes you unique? Is there anything else going on in your life that will affect your search? What is the biggest challenge you are facing in your career? This deeper level of communication is extremely helpful for us.

If Possible, Try to Meet Your Recruiter in Person. If you are in the same city as your recruiter, meeting face-to-face—whether for a cup of coffee or in the office for a more formal meeting—can only help the process. We find that meeting our candidates in person is much more conducive to developing a stronger, more trusting, and overall more successful relationship that yields more positive results.

Information That You Think Hurts You May Not Always Be As Bad As You Think. Candidates are often surprised to learn that what they believe are "deal-breaking black marks" on their resumes may be more common than they think and can often be explained to the firm's satisfaction once we are able to hear the story and learn the truth of the entire situation. The worst thing a candidate can do is try to withhold or omit important information because, in accordance with Murphy's Law, the information will eventually be found out, and the damage caused from withholding of the information is often much greater than the damage that would have been caused by simply providing the information up front.

It is OK to Brag About Yourself. One of the significant advantages about using a recruiter is that a recruiter can showcase and brag about you in ways that you can't. Although you may feel slightly uncomfortable if we ask you to highlight your achievements and all the positive things you've done, this type of information gives us the tools to highlight your key strengths to law firms. Tell us about all the positive praise and comments you've received, show us all of your letters of recommendation, tell us about all your achievements and all those other things that make you secretly so proud. Don't worry, we won't think you're conceited, and the firms will appreciate knowing this information.

The More We Know About Your Entire Job Search--Including Where You Have Applied in the Past--The Better We Will Be Able to Help You. One of the first questions we ask our candidates is, "Where have you applied in the past six months." There are several reasons we ask this important question. First, as noted above, we want to be absolutely sure to steer clear of any firms you have already contacted directly within the past six months.

We've seen candidates who feel hesitant to let us know that they may be looking for jobs in several cities at once or that they have already applied to several firms on their own or through another recruiter. Don't worry about it. We know that there are many different options when it comes to a job search, and we have been in your shoes ourselves. Letting us know everywhere you have previously applied (for at least the past six months), however, will help ensure that we do not submit you to a firm where you have already applied. In short, the more information we have about your situation, the better we are able to help you through the process.

Take Advantage of Your Expertise and Be Open and Honest With Us. We are experts in helping attorneys find jobs. We love to answer questions and provide guidance. While you are busy writing briefs, we are researching the market. Take advantage of what we know and what we can share with you. Don't be afraid to ask questions you may think are obvious.

Also, if you have certain specific expectations that are important to you, let us know. And if we are not meeting your expectations in any way, please let us know that as well. Working with a recruiter is a two-way relationship--it requires open communication, honesty, and clearly defined expectations.

Stay in Contact with Your Recruiter. Your job search is an extremely important time for you. When you are working with a legal recruiter, everything about what the legal recruiter is doing for you is about you. In addition, your job search is an important life event for you. Because you are in the midst of an important life event, it is important that you are communicating with your legal recruiter at all times.

Many candidates sit around and wait for their recruiters to contact them. While no one likes to be bothered unnecessarily, you need to realize that your legal recruiter works for you. Because your legal recruiter works for you, it is important that you provide your recruiters the direction they need in order to do their jobs as effectively as possible. In most cases, this will mean letting the recruiter know what you are feeling and thinking about your job search at all times.

Most of our recruiters work extremely hard. In fact, the substantial majority of our recruiters work between 10 and 12 hours a day. While our recruiters devote time to all of their candidates, candidates with more pronounced immediate needs are generally where the recruiter will put the majority of their time first. What this means, however, is that a recruiter must know the urgency of your particular job search.

As recruiters, we have worked with numerous types of candidates. Some candidates may decide they are not in a hurry to move but will consider a better offer if it comes along. Other candidates are in a hurry to move and want to get out of their present employment situation immediately. Some candidates are in between. For your recruiters to do their jobs as effectively as possible, it is important that you stay in touch with them and let them know precisely what is going on with your particular situation, such as your desire to pursue more firms, for example. Legal recruiters are not mind readers and may need to be prodded at times, especially if your job search increases in urgency.

Respect Your Legal Recruiter. Attorneys have different views of legal recruiters. Some attorneys realize and understand that legal recruiting at its very highest level is something that merits a great deal of respect. Other attorneys have different views of legal recruiters based on prior bad experiences. While the point of this article is not to convince you that legal recruiting is a serious profession, you do need to understand that it is important that you respect your legal recruiter. Your legal recruiter is in an advisory role that will have an impact over the course of your career.

Throughout the years, we have seen numerous types of personalities of different attorneys. We would estimate that more than 95% of the attorneys we have worked with have been absolute pleasures to work with. However, occasionally, the rare personality comes along that will lie, withhold important information, or even be blatantly disrespectful. The same rules of decorum that govern your other professional relationships should also apply to your relationship with your legal recruiter, if for nothing else, because it works to your advantage. When you

respect your legal recruiter, he/she will feel empowered to exert a great deal of effort on your behalf and enjoy doing so. No one likes to feel disrespected, and this includes your legal recruiter as well.

It is Important to Do What You Say You Are Going to Do and Say What You Mean. Every time a legal recruiter takes on a new candidate and submits a candidate to a law firm, the legal recruiter's credibility is on the line with the law firm it is submitting you to.

Most of our legal recruiters are speaking with law firms in major cities on a daily basis. When the legal recruiter is representing you, his/her job is to assist firms along in making hiring decisions. Accordingly, positive information you may share with your legal recruiter about a given firm or interview will likely be passed along to the law firm. If you are not telling the truth about this sort of thing, you risk harming the credibility of your legal recruiter.

In addition, if you go into your job search with the objective of achieving a certain result and decide later that you no longer want that result, you should share this information with your recruiter so that your recruiter's credibility is not unnecessarily harmed.

Conclusion

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Now that you know how to choose the best legal recruiter for your needs and how to maximize the effectiveness of working with that recruiter, you should be confident that your chances of landing your next position will increase significantly. Good luck!