



ATTORNEY SEARCH

by Caroline Lee, Esq.

Dear Petunia Partner: Practical Advice for the Everyday Lawyer- Part I

I am pleased to introduce you to Petunia Partner, a lovely figment of my imagination and my homage to all of the wonderful advice columnists of the world. Petunia joins us today to offer up her very special brand of practical advice for the everyday lawyer. I hope this first installment of Ms. Partner's lighthearted column helps you to avoid some of the common pitfalls that many lawyers face in today's hectic world. Petunia, take it away...

Dear Petunia:

I recently went to an in-person interview, and my recruiter asked if I was going to send a "thank-you" note to the firm. I really hate sending thank-you notes. They truly are the bane of my existence. I never know what or how much to say. Do firms really care if I send these types of notes?

-Fed up with thank you notes in Florida

Dear Fed up:

Your question does not surprise me at all. It seems to be a fact of life that many people, including attorneys, hate writing thank-you notes. When you are conducting a job search, one of the things that will bring you peace of mind is the knowledge that you have done everything in your power to convey a favorable impression to your potential employer. Unfortunately for you, this includes writing thank-you notes to each person you interview with and meet throughout the interviewing process.

Thus, if you participate in a firm interview and meet a recruiting coordinator, two partners, and four associates, you really should plan on sending out a personalized thank-you note to all seven people you encounter at the interview. The good news is that thank-you notes do not have to be long novels. In fact, a short and concise note that conveys appreciation for the other person's time is really the best kind of thank-you note you should send. Ideally, it is best to send a handwritten card that (1) reconfirms your interest in the firm and (2) thanks the other person for taking the time to meet you.

You also want to make sure that if you are sending multiple thank-you cards to different people at the same firm, each message differs slightly from the others. There is a large possibility that your interviewers may literally "compare notes" regarding your thank-you messages. It would also be wonderful if you could include a small detail or conversation piece from your personal interactions with each person in his or

**Dear Petunia Partner:
Practical Advice for the Everyday Lawyer- Part I**

her thank-you card. This small gesture will show you were genuinely interested and listening during each interview and create a stronger personal connection through your message.

When picking your thank-you cards, I recommend going as simple as possible. Try to avoid any cards with graphics or pictures. The best cards to use in a professional setting are the plain cards that say "Thank You" in elegant script on the front and are blank on the inside.

I think sending an actual thank-you card is a nicer and more thoughtful gesture than sending an email message. I do think, though, that a thank-you message sent through email is acceptable if you are either short on time or currently living overseas-in which case mail delivery would take an extremely long time. It is better to send an electronic thank-you via email than to send a thank-you note very late or not at all.

Dear Ms. Partner:

I really hate my job. I have only been at my current firm for three weeks, but I am beyond miserable. I am seriously thinking about giving notice. If I do quit my job, do I have to include this firm on my resume or can I "conveniently" leave it off? Please advise.

PAGE: 2

-Miserable in Montana

Dear Miserable:

I'm sorry to hear that you are in this predicament. Finding a good fit in your professional travels is a lot like finding the right partner in life-you often have to "kiss a lot of frogs" until you find the right one.

Let me address your resume question before I offer up any advice as to whether I think you should quit your job or not. If you do decide to leave your current position, you definitely need to include your current firm on your resume. It is crucial for you to be honest in your professional representations. This is true because (1) being honest is the right thing to do and (2) there is a good chance you will be caught in your lie at a crucial later date.

I have heard of attorneys who have been fired from subsequent positions for omitting firms from their resumes. The legal community is surprisingly small and close-knit. Thus, there is always the possibility that someone from your new firm will know someone from your old firm and that they will happen to stumble upon the subject of your job history. The integrity of your professional reputation is not something you ever want to compromise, so I would definitely include this firm on your resume.

Now, regarding whether you should leave your job or not, at the end of the day, this is a decision that only you can make for yourself. If you are intensely unhappy and this bad work environment is affecting both your mental and physical health, of course you should take all measures necessary to get yourself out of the situation. If, however, you are in a situation that is a bit rough for whatever reason but is somewhat manageable, you may just want to stick it out.

As tempting as it may be to walk up to that nasty partner in the firm and dramatically tell him or her off, try to bite your tongue for the good of your career. All of those people who have told you that it is much easier to get a job when you have a job are telling the truth. It is vastly easier to get hired at a new job when you are currently employed in most professions, and practicing law is no exception.

Furthermore, try to limit the amount of "firm hopping" you experience in your career. Sticking it out at your current firm for at least a year or two may save you a lot of future grief in your job search. It is no secret

that law firms often pass on really great and qualified candidates if the candidates' resumes have too many firms on them.

Hi Petunia:

I currently live and practice law in New Jersey. For the longest time, I have had an urge to move to California. I love sunny weather, and the thought of being able to wear shorts all year round puts a smile on my face. What is your take on the California market? Do California-based firms readily accept out-of-state candidates?

-California Dreamin' in Jersey

Dear California Dreamin':

There is no doubt about it that one of the best things about living in California is the great weather. Firms, however, do not always react favorably when this is the only/main reason given by candidates as to why they are seeking to move from out of state. In fact, if you tell a firm's recruiting coordinator that you want to move to California because you love the weather, you should absolutely expect him or her to respond with a dramatic rolling of the eyes.

Don't get me wrong. I do not think that California is a terribly hard market to crack if you are from another state. For the most part, California-based firms tend to be pretty welcoming of out-of-state candidates if they have the right credentials and background. The bottom line is that firms want to try to ensure as much as possible that any new hire is in it for the long haul. Making a move to another state or even another city is a significant commitment, and firms want to feel as securely as possible that your move is impending and permanent.

Having family and friends in the area is always a good answer as to why you want to move to California. Just make sure that what you say is true—in other words, don't invent an imaginary aunt who just happens to live in the same city as the firm. Lies have a way of catching up with you in the interviewing process (and life in general), so try to keep your nose clean.

Furthermore, will a move to the California market be better for your career? For example, if corporate work is slow in your market and is very strong in the market you are targeting, you can also identify this reason as a motivation for your relocation. Another element that shows a strong tie to the area is taking the dreaded California bar. No one takes this exam for fun, so if you have taken it upon yourself to get licensed in this state, that shows a strong commitment to moving to California.

Finally, coming from a top-tier firm or having experience in a specialized and in-demand area of law may also provide easier entry into California. As you know, law firms really value academic pedigrees and stellar professional credentials. In addition, law firms tend to give candidates with highly technical backgrounds a lot of consideration as well. Practicing law in a "hot" field or having a specialized background (e.g., electrical engineering or computer science) can also give you a free pass with firms if you lack strong ties to the area.

Dear Petunia:

I am a third-year associate, and I have never used a recruiter before. To maximize my chances, do you think it is better for me to work with more than one recruiter? Also, if I have a personal contact at a firm, should I use my personal contact or my recruiter to get my foot in the door?

-New to the Game in Georgia

PAGE: 3

Dear New to the Game:

If you find a recruiter who is an effective advocate and is truly invested in you, it is a better idea to use only one recruiter. The danger in using multiple recruiters is the potential for double or multiple submissions-unknowingly submitting your resume (personally or through recruiters) to the same firm multiple times in a short span of time.

When you first speak to a recruiter, you will want to confirm that he or she will not submit your resume to any firm without first getting your express permission. If you use more than one recruiter and one of them does not follow this principle, it is very possible that your resume will be sent to the same firm more than once. If this occurs within a six-month period of time, this will reflect very poorly on you from the firm's perspective.

Double submissions create an impression that you are not organized in your job search, as you seemingly do not know where your resume is being sent. If a firm can't count on you to know what is going on in your job search, how can the firm depend on you to be an intelligent contributor to its legal practice? If you use only one recruiter at a time, it is easier to stay organized. Having only one person to check in with helps you simplify the process of keeping track of your resume submissions and the different firms you are targeting.

Regarding your question about whether to use a personal contact or a recruiter to get you in the front door of a firm, I would recommend using a combination of both. I don't recommend solely using a personal contact without a recruiter unless you are confident of two things: (1) that this person truly has your best interests at heart and (2) that this person is highly respected at his or her firm.

There are dangers in having a friend or acquaintance pass along your resume to a firm's recruiting coordinator. For instance, if you do not know this person very well, how can you be sure he or she really wants to work with you? In addition, a lot of networking contacts may offer to pass along resumes to their firms' hiring partners, but how many of these people actually follow through on these promises? If your contact is someone you do not know very well, putting all of your trust in him or her may be a risky move. Using a professional legal recruiter is a safer bet, as you share the same interests and will work as a team.

If you are able to verify that your contact is trustworthy and will zealously advocate for your candidacy, you will also want to confirm whether he or she is respected and well liked at the firm. Your contact may have good intentions in referring your resume, but if he or she is generally disliked at the firm or will soon be fired, a stamp of approval from your contact will likely hurt your candidacy.

Thus, I believe the safest and most effective option you can choose in this scenario is to have your recruiter submit your resume to the firm first and then have your contact put in the good word for you afterward. Your recruiter will be able to make a strong first impression for you by initially creating and passing along effective marketing documents (e.g., an edited resume and a cover letter) to the firm, and your contact can then help by vouching for all of the representations made by your recruiter. In utilizing both a recruiter and your personal contact in this way, you really have the best of both worlds.

PAGE: 4