

Legal Recruiting from Non-Attorneys: An Overview of the Benefits and Challenges

By James Fant

Summary Non-attorney legal recruiters have become an increasingly common option for both law firms and individuals seeking legal positions. As the legal profession continues to change, non-attorney recruiters have emerged as a new way to fill crucial roles in legal recruiting.

Non-attorney legal recruiters offer many benefits to law firms, legal malpractice carriers, and individuals seeking legal positions. These recruiters provide specialized knowledge and skills that enable them to effectively identify and recruit candidates for positions. The different types of non-attorney legal recruiters range from retired lawyers and former legal professionals to those with industry experience in areas such as human resources, marketing, and recruiting. They are also better able to connect with potential candidates and build relationships with them to create a positive hiring experience.

For law firms, non-attorney recruiters can be a cost-effective way to fill positions since they typically charge a fraction of the costs associated with traditional attorney recruiters. Additionally, non-attorney recruiters can often establish relationships with candidates more quickly and efficiently, as well as have an understanding of the legal industry that is not always shared by attorneys.

For individuals seeking legal positions, non-attorney recruiters can provide a valuable service in helping them find the right position. Non-attorney recruiters can provide a range of services such as helping candidates understand the landscape of the legal profession and the different types of positions that are available. Additionally, they can provide practical advice on interviewing techniques, and job search strategies that can help individuals stand out from the competition.

Overall, non-attorney legal recruiters are becoming an increasingly important resource for both law firms and individuals seeking legal positions. By providing specialized knowledge and expertise, non-attorney recruiters can help both law firms and individuals connect and match the right candidate with the right position in an efficient and cost-effective manner. For law firms, non-attorney recruiters can offer a cost-effective alternative to traditional attorney recruiters; for individuals seeking legal positions, non-attorney recruiters can provide invaluable assistance in understanding the legal profession and the different types of positions that are available. As the legal profession evolves, non-attorney legal recruiters are sure to become an increasingly valuable part of the hiring process.

BCG Attorney Search is a legal placement firm and not a legal recruiting firm. There is a significant difference. [Read more about this here.](#)

One of the little-known secrets of the legal-recruiting industry is that a select few are not, in fact, attorneys. For some, this is deeply unsettling. How could a person who never attended law school, passed the bar, or billed 2,500 hours a year for a law firm possibly understand, help, or even deserve to play a role in the legal profession? In this view, a legal recruiter without a law degree is at best a poseur, at worst a rank amateur. One could imagine Woody Allen in *Zelig* sitting in a parlor, nodding gravely in a hiring-strategy discussion, despite not having finished high school, or even knowing what a law firm is.

Non-Attorneys as Legal Recruiters: Can It Work?

In the legal recruitment industry, attorneys recruit lawyers to work in different types of law firms. Their job is to find the right attorney for the right job. But what if a non-attorney was put in charge of the recruitment process? Could non-attorneys be successful legal recruiters?

This question has been asked a lot recently, as there seems to be more and more non-attorneys entering the legal recruiting industry. Some believe that non-attorneys could add a different perspective to the recruitment process, as they would bring a different set of skills and knowledge than attorneys. On the other hand, some argue that attorneys are better placed to understand the legal profession and the needs of law firms.

the best attorneys for certain roles, due to their legal knowledge.

Learn More About This Video

It is true that non-attorneys may not have the same legal training and background as attorneys, but they may have other skills that can help in the recruitment process. For instance, a non-attorney may have knowledge of the legal industry and job market, which can be used to their advantage. They may also possess exceptional networking and communication skills, which are important when hiring lawyers.

Non-attorneys may also be better equipped to identify the best candidates for a job. As they are not lawyers, they may be more objective in their evaluations than attorneys. This can be beneficial in a recruitment process, as the best-suited candidates can be identified rather than someone who is simply more qualified but may not be the best fit for the job.

I have to confess sympathy for this prejudice, and prejudice it is, [despite being a legal recruiter sans law degree](#). In my business career prior to joining [BCG Attorney Search](#), I stumbled across countless individuals and organizations who felt entitled, for one reason or another, to get something from me without ever having earned the right to it. Invariably, my irritation was that the guilty party wanted something for nothing. *That's not cricket*, I thought. Some of the transgressions seemed to draw their peculiar sense of entitlement from their educational or other pedigrees and had scant connection to helping me. For instance, I once sat in on a presentation in which a fairly successful businessman was trying to sell me his business. Rather than taking the time to listen, to try to understand my needs, and to explain how his firm could help me,

went through a litany of degrees that he had earned at various schools and a long, anesthetizing discussion of the degrees he had completed at the various programs. You could call this presenter a salesman with a tin ear, a simple buffoon based on the torture that we endured, a sociopath-but he was (unconsciously) onto something. Understanding not getting results are still not the acid test in many people's minds when working with a recruiter. Getting the best results to have primacy. Pedigree can be very important in the legal profession, and in life, for a number of reasons beyond the scope of this article; but in legal recruiting, it's arguably less so. The question should be "What can you do for *me*?" The product should be in the eating, *viz*, helping you get the job that you dreamed of and helping law firms get the ideal candidates and associates and partners that they seek.

See [A Comprehensive Guide to Working with a Legal Recruiter](#) for more information.

Agents in Hollywood are often (justly) held to scorn by creative people for not understanding, in an even shallower way, the artists that they represent-for being, in effect, predatory intermediaries. Yet despite this bad rap, the best agents are sought after, and many aspiring actors and writers would practically rip out and hand over one or both of their kidneys to secure their representation, and if they could physically reach that part of their backs. And some of those agents would probably happily accept such a bribe if they legally could and, perhaps, sell the bleeding organs on eBay. What

Security is in the product

General Douglas MacArthur famously defined security as the ability to produce. But it is possible to go a step further and define this in context. [The mark of a successful legal recruiter is the ability to produce optimal results for you in your job](#). What else, by comparison, matters? LSAT scores? (Confession: I have never even taken the LSAT).

Why join a club that wouldn't have me as a member?

A corollary of Groucho's famous dictum would seem to apply here. Why would someone want to join an industry if he/she were never previously a member, other than for crass commercial reasons? This is perhaps a question for which I am happy to answer it in my own case, however unrepresentative it may be.

I grew up in what could be termed a legal household. Talk of the latest batch of summer associates, pending cases, slings and arrows of outrageous clients was practically mother's milk to me. But I made the decision not to be an attorney early, supposedly at the age of three, when asked by a family friend if I would be a lawyer "like my daddy," and I said no, I hadn't taken the LSAT yet and had no plans to do so. Whether this was the result of genetic drift or a deeply ingrained streak does not matter. But the truth is, I have always been drawn to the law like a moth to a flame. For Robert D. O'Connell, *Apocalypse Now*, the smell of napalm in the morning was a stimulant; for me, the smell of a conference room on a Monday morning, littered with coffee cups and half-eaten danishes and even, in those halcyon days before ordinances against second-hand smoke, cigars in ashtrays was exhilarating. Or at least I remember it that way.

When I was an undergraduate at the [University of Chicago](#), I spent a term abroad at Oxford University. One of my friends arranged for me to work in a barrister's office for the summer at the Royal Inns of Court. He was a Queen's Counsel and had a case he was arguing before the House of Lords when I arrived. I researched and wrote memoranda on various motions and pleadings and drank tea with the chambers every day at 4 p.m., feeling very much at home. I thought I was transported into the fictional world of John Mortimer's *Rumpole of the Old Bailey*, but I didn't pretend to be anything other than I was: a college student. In fact, I established precedent by being the only mini-pupil (a sort of junior associate) who was not studying law. I was, as one waggish member of the chambers termed it, a "quasi-mini pupil."

But I am not a quasi-mini recruiter because such a thing simply cannot exist, except perhaps in an Austin Powers or *Avis*, I have to try harder. One of the most exciting things about this industry is that it is entirely knowledge-based. The knowledge that you need to become a legal recruiter is not, strictly speaking, taught in law school, during clerkships or in law firms.

The knowledge it takes to be a successful legal recruiter is gained through practical experience and very hard work with firms, understanding their cultures and practices, and advocating on behalf of candidates to help them get the

they possibly can. In my case, it has been gained by learning from one of the top [legal recruiters](#) in the country, the firm, who was willing to take me on board and mentor me. It is gained by being a hedgehog, in philosophy if not in appearance, which is such a rare creature that it is a protected species in Great Britain. A hedgehog is an animal with a singular focus, and like my talented colleagues here who are attorneys, we are all striving for the same thing, the very best possible job we can through relentlessness of focus and constantly working at becoming better recruiters.

Doctor, heal thyself

As has been discussed elsewhere on this site, legal recruiters are sometimes dismissed as failed attorneys. Some undoubtedly are. Others, though, aren't and have simply found a way to use the skills they developed as attorneys to provide greater value for law firms and candidates than they ever could billing out an hourly rate as associates or even as attorneys. Their satisfaction comes from helping people get jobs, and their passion is simply a reflection of their success in doing so.

The truth is that having a law degree, while extremely useful and worthwhile, and an excellent start to [becoming a recruiter](#), is no more predictive of success as a legal recruiter than having a hernia operation. The army of failed legal recruiters is a sad testament to that. But there is one species of legal recruiter to beware of, and that is the person who is entitled to work with you purely as a result of what he/she has done in the past and not for what he/she will do for you. In other words, the belief that he/she deserves to represent you without putting in the extremely hard work that the legal industry requires. Unlike a hedgehog and more like a peacock, such a recruiter will flourish his/her feathers, but on the day, that won't help you get the job that you want and need. Avoid this species of recruiter like the plague.

On the other hand, [BCG Attorney Search](#) has carefully built up its reputation over several years through present accomplishments, not only past glories.

Other considerations

Besides getting results, the *sine qua non* of any effective recruiter, there are other "softer," yet still important, [aspects of recruiting](#) germane to this discussion. While I believe they are secondary, they are nevertheless important.

An excellent recruiter is more than someone who merely gets you a job. He/She is also, in many cases, a trusted advisor, a listening ear-someone who can empathize with and understand, on a profound level, the situation of the candidate he/she represents. And here I must admit something that I can never quite overcome: I have never been in your shoes. Yes, I have been overworked and underappreciated. Yes, I have experienced pulling all-nighters in college and law school, sweating through interviews, and trying and succeeding to move to a more congenial part of the country, but I haven't practiced law at an [AmLaw 100 firm](#).

If that is what is most important to you, then shoot me. No, actually what I will do is I will refer you to one of my many colleagues who have done that. However, I will say in passing that the advisors we come to know and trust, the service professionals we seek out in a variety of industries, are not simply effective commiserators, or recovering former associates who have become agony aunts, but people who are objective and empathetic. You don't seek out a surgeon who has broken his leg or gotten orthopedic surgery, but one who is a true expert and a consummate professional.

Every day I work hard at being both.

The business of legal recruiting

The legal profession is many things, but at its heart, it is a business. As the latest recession has proven, [law firms are insulated or isolated from broad macroeconomic trends or microeconomic profitability considerations](#). Unprecedented partnership dissolutions, and a massive falloff in corporate work have driven this reality home to many who consider law to be a safe haven from the slings and arrows of the outrageous economy.

What does this have to do with legal recruiting? The answer is plenty. In fact, a few of the most famous recruiters in the United States are not attorneys. The reason is simple: They approach the challenge of recruiting as the profession that it is.

as a frivolous sideshow of the law. They are businesspeople who put a premium on client relationships and satisfaction. As a result, law firms pay close attention when they send candidates over for consideration.

In my career to date, I have conducted business in more than 25 countries, hired dozens of people, helped build millions of dollars of revenue, and lived abroad for several years. During that time, I have gone over at least a thousand resumes, conducted hundreds of interviews, and even hired a prestigious law firm in the Bay Area for my last company. This process gave me a bit of insight into what makes a good employee and [how to conduct yourself](#) when you are looking for a job. Most attorneys or not, have not made numerous hiring decisions themselves and have not been forced to live with the consequences of a bad match. Hiring decisions are literally among the most important decisions that a firm can make. Because many candidates have not been through large numbers of interviews in their careers, and in many cases are not familiar with the specialized kinds of interviews that they encountered in law school, it is important to work with someone who can guide you through the process of getting a job in an expert fashion.

Thinking outside the box

While this may come as a surprise to many, the quality of a recruiter is directly a result of the quality of thinking that he/she does and the action taken based on that thinking. If the concept of a thinking recruiter sounds oxymoronic, if not comical or humorous, then you have had the experience that so many attorneys have had with recruiters who are essentially drones or worse. Nevertheless, it is important that you consider the ramifications of not working with a thinking recruiter.

For example, suppose you were considering relocating, and you had the choice of working with someone who would actually go out and call a few firms in your target area and pray for the best or someone who would actually spend time actively thinking about you, even challenging some of the assumptions you might have made and developing a strategy based on your strengths generated by Socratic discussion. Furthermore, if a recruiter functions as a drone, or an automatic toaster, who merely spends each day popping out resumes to the "usual suspects," you are almost certainly missing out on opportunities that you may not be aware of. It takes a kind of scrappiness, an entrepreneurial approach, to make sure that no stone is left unturned in your search.

With whom would you rather work?

Changing a job is one of the most important things that you can do in your life. Attorney-recruiters, while hardworking and brilliant, do not have a monopoly on this type of thinking process.

Conclusions

It is easy to dismiss legal recruiters who are non-attorneys. But to do so risks limiting the options you have, and in the process you will miss out on working with me.

I believe that it stems from a misapprehension about the role of a legal recruiter. [In essence, you should choose a recruiter for what he/she has done in the past, but for what he/she can do for you now.](#) As one of the few non-attorney recruiters at Attorney Search, I believe I speak for all of us when I say that that is how we would like to be judged. And based on the volume of placements that we make and satisfied customers that we have, our ability to get things done puts us at the top of the legal-recruiting industry.

See the following articles for more information:

[What Characteristics Should I Look for in a Legal Recruiter?](#)

[Interview yourself first - questions to ask before starting your lateral search](#)

[How to Choose a Good Attorney Recruiter](#)

[Why You Should Be Talking to a Legal Recruiter Right Now](#)

[Choosing a Legal Recruiter](#)

[Your Legal Career as a Small Business](#)

[Should I Use a Legal Recruiter? Top 10 Reasons to Use a Legal Recruiter](#)

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

What makes a world class recruiter

10 Things That Most Legal Recruiters Will Not Tell You

Want to learn more about [legal recruiter jobs](#)? Find out more in [this in-depth article](#) about legal recruiting.

See What Other Candidates Are Saying: [Testimonials and Reviews](#)

BCG Attorney Search is looking for driven recruiters to [join our team](#). BCG Attorney Search covers the entire U.S., States, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. We offer first-rate training and coaching, pay top of market commissions to our recruiters as employees and not independent contractors, and offer medical insurance and other benefits. Additionally, BCG is the best known brand in the industry and is part of a 200+ employee legal employment company. We offer a supportive cooperative atmosphere and provide you with everything you need to be the most effective recruiter possible (continually updated internal job database, massive advertising support, incredible back office support, and many other perks designed to ensure you match every possible candidate with every available position).