

# Important Questions Attorneys Should Ask to Evaluate Employment Offers they Receive from Law Firms: A Questionnaire and Worksheet

Congratulations! You have successfully interviewed at a law firm, and now you have an offer to show for it! This questionnaire and worksheet is intended to assist you with a thorough analysis of the law firm and the offer, as well as give you an opportunity for self-reflection. Bear in mind that there are typically only so many lateral moves an attorney can make (without a substantial book of business) before firms begin to frown on the constant movement. Do not make your decision hastily. Each move must be seriously considered with a great deal of careful thought.

This questionnaire is useful for attorneys comparing and contrasting two competing offers, as well as attorneys considering the prospect of remaining at their current firm. While there are undoubtedly many questions to ask yourself when considering an offer (and we will discuss these topics at length below), I believe it is most important to focus on four major questions:

- 1. Do you feel a positive gut instinct about this firm and the offer?**
- 2. Are you excited about the opportunity?**
- 3. Do you feel that this firm has offered you an opportunity that is better than your current situation?**
- 4. Can you envision a long-term relationship with this firm, or does the opportunity at this firm get you closer to your ultimate goal?**

If the answers to the above questions are affirmative, then it is likely that the move will be a positive one! But there are many other factors that will influence your decision. Spend some time carefully asking yourself the questions below and filling out the worksheet at the conclusion of the questionnaire.

## OFFER ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE

### Personality Considerations

Does the firm generally share your beliefs/attitude regarding the practice of law?

Are you comfortable around the associates and partner with whom you'll be working?

Do you feel a sense of collegial camaraderie at the firm?

Have you talked with other associates who have worked for the partner you will be assigned to? What did they think of the partner? What is the partner's reputation as a boss?

Can you see yourself genuinely fitting in at the firm?

Does the firm share your work ethic?

Have you considered the dress code of the firm? Does the attire match your personality? (Or can you live with the dress code?)

Has there been a great deal of turnover at the firm in recent years? This can point to a potentially hostile environment.

### **Have you done your homework on the firm?**

Check all available research outlets:

Avery Index

Chambers & Partners

Vault

American Lawyer

Have you examined and are you comfortable with the firm's billable-hour requirements?

Have you examined the bonus structure at the firm?

Have you looked at the profits per partner for the firm? And have you examined any differences between [tiered partnership](#) tracks?

Have you considered the frequency with which attorneys *in your section* make partner at the firm?

Will there be quite a few associates at your level that will be up for partnership at the same time? Will there ultimately be several associates competing for one partnership spot?

Have you talked with associates at your level who are already practicing with the firm? (Be discreet, however, and do not make those at the firm feel they are under too much scrutiny.)

Have you read any recent articles published about the firm (in *The [American Lawyer](#)*, for example)?

### **Do the dollars make sense?**

Is this firm offering you a pay raise, is the salary equivalent to what you are paid now, or will you receive a pay decrease?

Will you be "slotted" at an appropriate level for your graduation year? Will you have to take a step back in terms of the length of time it will take you to make partner? (This could be a good thing if you need more time to hone your skills/adapt to a new location/grow your book of business. But it can be a major negative for some.)

Is the firm paying market salary for its size and reputation?

If the firm offers lower salaries, does it make up for it with lower billable-hour requirements, more hands-on opportunities, or better quality of life?

Will the salary help you achieve your personal financial goals (paying off law school loans, buying a house, etc.)?

Again, examine the cost of living if you are changing locations. Do not get too hung up on the overall numbers; instead, determine how far a dollar goes in the new location you are considering.

Is the firm itself financially stable?

## Location, location, location

Is this offer in a city where you can see yourself living for a length of time?

Is it important to your significant other to be in this region or location?

Do you have friends and family in the region?

Is the economy of the region healthy? Are businesses thriving and growing in the region? Will there be sufficient business/future clients to sustain the office of the firm?

Is the office a satellite office? Is there enough work to sustain the office's growth?

Is the future growth of this particular office a firm-wide goal?

Do lawyers in this particular office make partner?

Examine the cost of living in the city where the office is located. (See [cgi.money.cnn.com/tools/costofliving/costofliving.html](http://cgi.money.cnn.com/tools/costofliving/costofliving.html).)

Does the city's lifestyle match your interests and activities?

Will the climate affect you? Are you averse to warm climates? Do you tend to be miserable in cold climates?

## Diversity considerations

Does the firm have a strong diversity program?

Does the firm not only attract diverse talent but also *retain* diverse talent?

Are diverse attorneys at the firm [making partner](#)?

Are there strong women's initiatives at the firm?

Are there a lot of women partners?

Is there a supportive work environment for parents?

Does the firm have a strong reputation for being GLBT friendly? (See [www.hrc.org/placestowork](http://www.hrc.org/placestowork).)

## Practice Area Considerations

Will new learning opportunities be available to you?

Will the opportunity expand the breadth of your experience?

Will you have the opportunity to work in your desired practice area?

Will you be working with well-regarded attorneys in your particular field?

Will there be opportunities for you to explore new and interesting practice areas in addition to your own? Is

this important to you?

Will there be an opportunity in the future for you to *change* your practice area? Or will there be an opportunity to work in a new area of law that is attractive to you?

### **Will there be possible in-house opportunities in the future?**

Do corporations like to hire from this particular law firm?

Will there be opportunities to receive the rigorous law firm training that companies so value?

Will the prestige of the firm open doors for you in the corporate environment at a later stage?

### **Firm size**

Is the size of the firm important to you?

Are you more comfortable in a **large firm or in a small firm**?

Is it important to you that your firm have a national presence? An international presence? A regional presence?

How many people work in the office you are considering? Is that a plus or a minus?

How important is it to you to have the resources that large firms provide?

Are you more comfortable in a **large firm** or in a small firm

Is it important to you to have a large support staff?

### **Prestige**

Is the firm ranked on **the Am Law 100**? The Am Law 200?

Is the firm recognized in your region?

Is the firm recognized by Chambers & Partners?

Does the firm have large Fortune 100 clients? Fortune 500 clients? Sophisticated clients?

### **Environment**

Do you like the firm's offices? Does the quality of the offices matter to you?

Do you like the location of the office in which you will be working?

Are the offices convenient to your home? If not, will this be a large sacrifice?

### **Quality of life**

Have you examined any quality-of-life considerations at the firm?

Have you assessed whether the firm is on any quality-of-life "lists" (whether good or bad)?

Have you examined associate satisfaction rankings?

PROFESSIONAL GOALS WORKSHEET

In two years, I see myself \_\_\_\_\_.

In five years, I see myself \_\_\_\_\_.

In 10 years, I see myself \_\_\_\_\_.

In 20 years, I see myself \_\_\_\_\_.

My preferred firm is of small/medium/large (circle one) size.

My preferred firm is in this region in the short term: \_\_\_\_\_

My preferred firm is in this region in the long term: \_\_\_\_\_

I want my working environment to be: \_\_\_\_\_.

I want my practice to encompass: \_\_\_\_\_.

Please rank in order of importance to you (be honest and realistic with yourself!):

- ☐ I want to specialize in a particular area.
- ☐ I want to change my practice area.
- ☐ I want high-profile clients/cases/deals.
- ☐ I want to work for a very well-regarded partner.
- ☐ I want to have great opportunities for mentorship and training.
- ☐ I want to have access to numerous resources.
- ☐ I want to have prestigious firms on my resume.
- ☐ I want to have ample opportunities to go in-house in the future.
- ☐ I want to make partner (and work at a place where this is possible).
- ☐ I want to work for an international firm.
- ☐ I want lower billable hours.
- ☐ I want to find an alternative career.
- ☐ I want opportunities for direct client contact.
- ☐ I want to be in the courtroom on a regular basis.
- ☐ I want to work in a different region or city.
- ☐ I want a higher level of compensation.
- ☐ I want significant opportunities for pro bono work.
- ☐ I want to find a firm where I can stay for a long time.
- ☐ I want a supportive, nurturing environment.
- ☐ I want an opportunity to work abroad.
- ☐ I want job security at a stable firm.
- ☐ I want to work with collegial individuals.
- ☐ I want a nice mixture of work and quality of life.
- ☐ I want leaner staffing of cases/deals (more responsibility).
- ☐ I want to work in a large office.
- ☐ I want to start my own firm.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I want to develop my own clients.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I want to work in a firm that values diversity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I want to work in a firm that has good opportunities for women.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

Which five or six factors did you rank the highest? These are the most important points to keep in mind while you consider your offer. Does the opportunity match your future goals and desires?