

8 of the Most Common Questions Attorneys Have About Legal Recruiting Answered

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office

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

Legal recruiting is a niche business that caters to a relatively small subset of the legal community. Like any business, recruiting is constrained by the business realities of the marketplace. Smaller firms are often unwilling or unable to pay search fees. Firms that are open to paying search fees are generally looking for a specific demographic of candidates. I have also made an attempt to answer some of the more common questions we receive (sometimes on a daily basis). I have also provided answers to some of the questions that we suspect lawyers don't ask but would like to ask.

1. Why don't recruiters return my phone calls?

It is a mystery to me why any service provider would let a phone call go unanswered. After all, you never know who is going to meet a potential client or a friend of a potential client. While I do not feel any compulsion to respond to a message left by a telemarketer, I always try to respond to inquiries (or ask a colleague to respond on my behalf).

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

Nonetheless, it is a fact of life for many professionals that there are not enough hours in the day to do everything. When recruiters receive messages from candidates they know they cannot place, those messages go to the bottom of the priority list. To understand this, it is important to understand the economics of the legal recruiting industry.

2. How do recruiters get paid?

While [good recruiters build close relationships with their candidates](#), recruiting fees are paid by the employer. When an employer hires a candidate that was first introduced by a recruiter, [the search firm is entitled to a fee \(generally 25% of the candidate's first year salary\)](#). This fee is usually paid 30 days after the candidate begins working for the firm. Many search firms make a portion of their fee for a period of months.

[Learn More About This Video](#)

Given the salary inflation that has occurred in the legal profession, these fees can get quite large. Employers are eager to pay search fees unless they are hiring a "stellar" candidate. In the eyes of the client firm, "stellar" generally associate with two to six years of experience at a major firm (which usually means strong academics) or a partner with substantial portable billings (i.e., in the hundreds of thousands).

Employers will occasionally ask a search firm to submit a more diverse mix of candidates. But this is only in the event there is a particular shortage of experienced talent.

See also:

[Why Almost No Law Firms Care About Legal Recruiter Fees](#)

3. Can you refer me to a recruiter who works with recent grads/associates who lack large firm experience?

I receive a lot of phone calls from recent [law school graduates](#) who are [looking for their first legal jobs](#). I also receive a lot of phone calls from lawyers who lack strong academics and/or large law firm experience. Unfortunately, there is not much that search firms can do to help these two groups. Law firms do not use outside search firms to recruit entry-level talent. Law firms are generally unwilling to pay search firms for candidates that they can reach through conventional advertising.

If you lack large law firm experience (or experience at a [boutique firm](#)), you are probably better off spending your time conducting informational interviews. Find alumni of your law school who are willing to speak with you for a few minutes. Showing up at bar association meetings for your practice area and make a point of talking to a few new people who show up. Ask college and law school classmates to introduce you to [lawyers who have practices](#) that interest you.

Searching the classifieds can be part of your strategy. (Signing up for a subscription to LawCrossing, BCG's sister site, is one way to make sure you have access to every job posting out there.) But making an aggressive effort to "meet" people should be a large part of your strategy.

If you are unemployed and have the time, try to do work on a contract basis as a way of getting your foot in the door and your availability to do contract work when you are out networking.

Try to avoid contract work which is unlikely to lead to permanent employment. Many of the assignments that you get through a temporary staffing agency are going to be large document review projects that require an army. It is assignments like these will help you to build your skills or your contacts.

4. Which recruiters do in-house placement?

Most search firms do some in-house placement. BCG is unusual in **focusing exclusively on law firm placement** looking for a search firm that does in-house placement, **understand that in-house search is very different from law** Virtually all major law firms work with search firms from time to time. But only a subset of corporations will rely on **to hire in-house counsel**. More importantly, in the world of law firm search, most search firms have knowledge and listings. This is not the case with in-house search.

If you are pursuing other law firm opportunities, the real value of working with a recruiter is that you have someone help you sort through your options. In addition, a good recruiter can help you to uncover information that may be your decision-making process. A good recruiter can be your agent and help you to communicate effectively with employer regarding salary, benefits, and terms of employment. For this reason, it makes more sense to work with if you are pursuing **a lateral move** to another firm.

If you are **considering an in-house move**, a recruiter may play some of the same advisory role. But since good in-house opportunities are more difficult to identify, it is to your advantage to work with multiple recruiters. Each search firm may be aware of different opportunities.

Most importantly, if you are thinking about an in-house move, it is in your best interest to do a search which involves working with recruiters, keeping up with all the job boards, and networking aggressively.

5. How do I find a recruiter I can trust?

Finding a recruiter you can trust is similar to finding any service provider. Talk to your friends and see if they know a **recruiter in your area**. Ask the career services office at your law school if they know anybody. If you identify someone, Google the individuals and see if you can find biographies. Have they written any articles on career-related issues? Do they have information about them on a website which tells you more about their recruiting philosophy? Do they follow any ethical guidelines?

6. I have friends at many of the firms where I want to submit my resume. I still work with a recruiter?

There are some instances where it might make sense to approach a firm through a personal contact. If a partner has firsthand knowledge of your capabilities, then it may make sense to make a direct approach through that partner. On the other hand, if your contact only knows you in a social context (e.g., you are friendly with her son) or if the contact is simply a school classmate who knows nothing about the quality of your work, then you may want to have a recruiter make the introduction and have your contact put in a good word for you only after the introduction has been made.

7. If recruiters charge large fees, wouldn't firms rather get a resume directly?

Most companies (law firms included) are not looking for excuses to incur large recruiting fees. On the other hand, lateral associates are so valuable to law firms (if they have the work and not enough bodies to do the work) that firms are happy to pay these fees. In the end, the firm will more than earn back the search fee in several months.

8. A recruiter sent my resume to over 30 firms without my permission. Can I resubmit my resume to some of these firms using another search firm?

Submitting a resume to a firm without the candidate's express permission is an unscrupulous practice. Any recruiter with integrity understands that getting your resume into the wrong hands could jeopardize your current position. Nonetheless, we do occasionally hear stories about recruiters who are only out to make a quick buck. Unfortunately, resumes do have a life of at least six months. No law firm wants to risk being responsible for two search fees. So once your resume has been presented to the firm by any source, the law firm will not work with another search firm for at least this amount of time.

Frequently Asked Questions

How Much Do Legal Recruiters Make Per Placement?

In the legal recruiting world, the compensation system is extremely rewarding. [Legal recruiters](#) earn between 50% of the revenue they generate. In addition to paying the above-market rate, we have a tiered commission structure with a 60% that rewards recruiters who bring in more business. [The average recruiter makes more money than a Biglaw attorney and gets to maintain more of a personal life outside of the office.](#) The best part is that you get paid to help people.

The high performers make what partners earn at Biglaw firms. Recruiters can make \$350,000 from one deal for a \$2 million compensation. On an average deal, recruiters will earn \$1,583 per hour. Deals are not consistently as much like a [law practice](#), not every hour is billable (in this loose sense) - but the time spent fostering relationships and researching the local knowledge of the legal market is hardly monotonous or a waste of time.

How Do Recruiters Get Paid?

We have discussed how external recruiters are paid, so let's look at the different ways in which they get paid. The methods are:

1. Contingency

Recruiters are not paid until their qualified candidates are placed. According to the above example, the recruiter receives their \$14,000 until after the fact. Obviously, the recruiter competes with the client's HR department. The recruiter also has to compete with other external recruiters who are trying to fill the position. Recruiters are not paid if their candidate is not ultimately selected by the organization.

That is what it means to work on contingency. The recruiter works in the hopes of placing a candidate and then gets paid.

2. Retainer

Recruiters are paid upfront, rather than afterward. So they get the money before they start working. In this case, the recruiter is in direct competition with anyone. That means they are giving the search their full attention. The search is not contingent on anything else. The search is not dependent on anything else. Because they have it already!

3. Container

It is a hybrid of #1 and #2. Recruiters receive roughly half of their fees upfront before they begin the search. Once a candidate is hired, the remaining fee is collected. Clients "engage" the recruiter and have their attention by paying half of the fee.

A thousand dollars usually gets someone's attention - and keeps it. The fees for retained searches are also typically higher because the searches are at a higher level. That is one thing to keep in mind.

Recruiters are paid in a variety of ways based on a variety of factors. They are paid based on their preferences. Clients also pay recruitment firms according to how they like to deal with them. The type of search is another factor.

The types of businesses, preferences, and searches are countless. As a result, the recruiting industry as a whole has a diverse payment system.

Do Recruiters Take A Cut Of Your Salary?

Recruiters do not take a cut from your salary. Recruiters receive a percentage of your first year's salary from the client who places you with if the employer and recruiting agency have a contingency agreement.

What Does A Legal Recruiter Do?

There are several reasons why law firms or other legal organizations should hire recruiting firms. [Attorneys can find the best candidates they do best](#), which is practicing law. The recruiting firm focuses on finding the right candidate for the job, including conducting interviews and making an introduction between the two parties.

A recruitment team's main responsibility is [finding legal professionals for open positions within the organization](#). They implement a strategy that will attract the right people and screen the resumes that they receive. This process could take weeks or even months depending on how many people apply for a job and what type of skill set is needed.

Another part of recruiting is [interviewing potential candidates and testing their knowledge about law and procedure](#). In general, to see if they are qualified enough to work at the firm. The recruitment team will also contact everyone who is interested in the position and schedule interviews for the people they feel are qualified to meet with the hiring manager.

When the time comes to making legal recruiting offers, most recruiters write up contracts that show what the candidate will be paid and how many hours they will be expected to work each week. They also negotiate and explain work conditions and benefits to the potential employees.

Recruiters must have excellent communication skills because they [deal with hiring managers, candidates, and other departments](#) on a daily basis. They also need to be detail-oriented so that they can keep track of all the paperwork involved in recruiting as well as staying organized throughout the entire process.

The main responsibilities of a [legal recruiter](#) are to find new talent for an organization, interview candidates and test their skills, represent the company's culture, negotiate contracts on behalf of clients, and help clients connect with their desired candidates.

They must develop strategies that will attract the right people, screen resumes that come into the office (while also looking for red flags), and set up interviews for candidates. They must be great at communicating and connecting with other people. They must constantly stay organized.

How To Work With A Legal Recruiter?

In your [legal job search](#), legal recruiters can be a great asset, but remember that they work for the hiring company. Recruiters can be divided into two types. Companies pay contingent recruiters only if the candidates they recommend are hired. Retained recruiters get paid whether the candidate is hired or not.

A number of excellent legal recruiters will go [above and beyond to help you land a job](#). On the other hand, some recruiters exaggerate their placement records and do not have your best interests in mind. It is easy to recognize a good recruiter. They know a great deal about legal employers and practice areas. You will receive a prompt response to your calls and emails. You will be treated with respect. You can ask them to review your resume and cover letter and prepare for interview questions. They can give you honest advice as to whether the job is a good match for you or not. The best recruiters will even tell you if they do not think you need their services, and that you should pursue jobs through your college's career services center or other means. You should [find a recruiter](#) who provides you with this level of service if yours is not. Contacting the Association of Legal Search Consultants is one way to find a quality recruiter. A recruiter who is a member of this organization adheres to its code of ethics regarding relationships with candidates.

[When working with recruiters](#), keep these points in mind:

Developing a good relationship with the recruiter is in your best interest. Be as honest as possible about your previous employment and educational background. Recruiters build their reputations on the quality of the candidates they present to their clients. A recruiter will look bad if you mislead him or her about your qualifications, which will reduce your chances of landing a job. Avoid being rude or pushy. If your attitude is bad (or if you lie about your qualifications), recruiters may spread the word to their colleagues. Keep the lines of communication open with recruiters. If you decide to narrow or broaden your job search, let the recruiter know as soon as possible so you do not waste his or her time.

If you are told that you have not been selected for an interview by an employer, do not try to circumvent the recruiter. The recruiter has a vested interest in getting you a job (since then he or she gets paid). In situations like this, contacting the employer makes you look desperate and shows that you do not understand how the hiring process works. Recruiters have long memories and will not forget what you do.

Work only with recruiters who have a history of placing legal workers. You most likely will not be able to land a job if you do not.

general recruiter who lacks the inside knowledge you need.

Send your resume only to companies you are interested in and only for positions you are seeking. The recruiter will send your resume to companies you are not interested in or for a job you do not want. You may lose out on future job opportunities. Additionally, if your resume becomes widely available on job sites, it may be harder to keep your job search a secret from your present employer.

Recruiters should not be paid. They may not have technical expertise in the legal industry or have inside information about job openings, and they are not recruiting agencies or recruiters. Instead, they are employment agency workers, career coaches, or executive marketing firms.

Using a recruiter when appropriate is important. Many recruiters do not work with recent law school graduates, instead focusing their efforts on junior associates or senior partners. It is most important for recruiters to work with candidates who attended top law schools, who have stellar academic records, and who have worked for top law firms or other employers for a long time. You may find a job by looking for positions on employment sites, legal publication job listings, networking, or you may contact on-campus recruiters (from law firms and other organizations that employ lawyers).

What Will The Hours Look Like As A Legal Recruiter?

There is no doubt that law is an inflexible industry that has relented somewhat in recent years. Every minute of every day counts when rates easily reach double the minimum wage per minute. If you exceed the billable hour requirements, you will be more productive. For attorneys who need to take maternity leave or reduce their hours for a variety of reasons, law firms can be unforgiving. Recruiters have a more flexible schedule. Can you take a break? No, but you will not be. Monday morning, writing a motion for summary judgment while testing the toxic potential of the new Redbull/Yerba Mate/Monster mixer you concocted to ward off 40 straight hours of mental exertion.

Mothers and fathers working from home or scheduling their work around their kids are able to maintain a family life while supporting their family.

What Is the Legal Recruiting Culture Like?

Despite the fact that not all recruiting firms are alike, inexperience is generally not met with disdain but with constructive advice. Many of the deals facilitated are split between two recruiters who take on the task together. Many recruiters work across regions given local knowledge and relationships. The point is to work as a team. The industry is set up to share and bear expenses, not make a profit on individual deals. The fees are relatively low in comparison with lawyer fees.

How Do I Choose A Legal Recruiter?

If you have never worked with a recruiter before, it can be difficult to know where to begin. There is a good chance you will receive numerous calls from different legal recruiters, but here are some tips to help you make an informed decision on how to choose a legal recruiter:

Speak with a handful of different recruiters. [You should explore all your options.](#) Then you will be able to tell who is the right fit for you based on your gut feeling. Do not spend too much time talking about yourself. Make sure the recruiter is attentive to your desires and goals, appears responsive, and is willing to enter into a true partnership. An excellent recruiter will be focused on your career, not just a specific position he or she wants to fill at that particular time.

Verify the recruiter online. Verify that the recruiter's name and company are legitimate by doing a Google search. [years, several candidates have told me they have been contacted by legal recruiters they could not even find online.](#) Check the recruiter's LinkedIn page for further verification. You can often find recommendations from candidates who can speak about their own experiences and give you a sense of what the recruiter is like to work with.

Consider a recruiter who is physically based in your target market. Recruiters build relationships. Through regular contact with the local law firms, they develop very strong local client relationships. Recruiters in local markets have access to job opportunities that applicants in other markets will not have access to -- often unpublished. The recruiter may not be qualified to represent you as a candidate in a given market if he or she does not follow the local legal news closely. It is always better when it comes to recruiters.

Consult the recruiter about recent placements. [A recruiter who understands your career goals](#) can assist you in achieving them. You can confirm whether or not a recruiter works in that market or with a particular client by asking for recent placements. Seeing placements only in a certain practice area or with a few local firms is a sign that the fit is not right.

Ask for references. Recruiters should be able to provide recent candidates who can validate their work. Get in touch with them to see how responsive and proactive the recruiter is. Was the recruiter in regular contact with the candidate, or was contact mostly initiated by the candidate? The recruiter listen to the candidate's goals or did he/she simply submit the candidate for the open position? [If you know the experiences of past candidates, you can set expectations for working with them.](#) Throughout your legal career, it is imperative that you have the [support of an advisor who can guide you through your career.](#) Establishing a partnership early on will help you ensure that you have that person on your side. Be diligent and make sure you are in good hands.

What You Should Never Tell A Recruiter?

Although the recruiter does not make the final hiring decisions, they do have a say over which candidates are presented to their clients and what kind of recommendations they make. No matter how friendly you get with your recruiter, it is important to remain professional and avoid saying these things:

1) I will take anything

It becomes tempting at this point in your job search to accept a job from anywhere! You should not share this information with your recruiter. Employers want candidates who are passionate about their work and have a clear idea of the direction they would like their careers to take, not someone who will do anything for the money.

2) It is only a short term arrangement

When you are out of a job, you may need a "bridge" job to keep you afloat until you find something more permanent. However, you should never disclose this information to a recruiter. Due to this trust, they are expected to supply their clients with candidates who are committed to the role, so even hinting at the fact that it is not your dream job may exclude you from future opportunities.

3) My last company was just AWFUL

In a formal job interview (or you should not anyway!) you would not badmouth your previous employer, and you should not do so in a casual interview as well. There's a good chance they'll ask you why you left or what motivated you to look for a new job, but you should not use this as an opportunity to vent all your frustrations with the company. You won't look good.

4) I do not think I will take the job

So you are going through the motions for a new job; your recruiter sent your CV to the client, the client invited you for an interview, and the arrangements have been made. You know deep down that you will not be taking the job because you have other interviews lined up, you do not want to leave your current job and other reasons. Keeping your options open is understandable, but do not tell your recruiter that or all trust will probably be lost and they will feel all their hard work was for nothing.

5) I am just waiting for my counteroffer

What better way to remind your boss what they have than to threaten to leave? You should probably keep this to yourself. If your recruiter is involved in a scheme to get a pay raise or promotion, rather than letting them know they are a part of it.

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

Learn the top 10 [reasons to become a legal recruiter](#) in this related article.

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 United 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).