

How to Know When You Should Stay in Your Law Firm Job or Move to a New Law firm Job

In the first of a two-part series, Claudia Spielman, BCG Attorney Search recruiter, uses her own experience to guide young attorneys (though the advice applies to anyone in or contemplating a career in the legal industry) on how to evaluate whether to stay at a law firm.

Should I stay or should I go? I found myself asking this very question at a very early stage in my [legal career](#). If you are reading this, I assume you are also pondering whether or not [you should stay in the legal profession](#). This is a serious question, and you should research it as much as possible before making the decision. [Approach the question as you would any legal issue](#): be objective and reserve judgment until after getting all the facts. Make sure to make a decision that honestly reflects your feelings, because it is most likely going to be a decision that will permanently affect the rest of your life.

Why I chose to take a "hiatus" from the profession

[Like all attorneys, I worked hard during law school so I could work for the best firm in my practice area.](#) I succeeded and received an offer in my third year of law school to work with a top IP firm. [A month into my career at the firm, I found I passed the California Bar Exam on my first try and was even asked to be a grader for it. I felt invincible.](#) I was working at a prestigious firm, and at age 25, I was making more money than both of my parents combined; shoot, I was making more money than most people supporting families do. I was the envy of my college (and even some law school) friends. Like most new starting attorneys, I thought I was set for life.

For various reasons, the firm was not a good fit, and I started looking elsewhere. Additionally, the type of IP law I practiced was very slow. Consequently, it was not [feasible to find a comparable position in another firm](#); there simply weren't any openings. To continue practicing law, I found I would have had to change practice areas, and I started applying to positions and firms that I would not normally consider. As I interviewed, I realized more and more that I was pushing myself to do something that I did not have a passion for. I was too young to push myself into a career I did not want to go into with full force.

While I was still interviewing for positions as an attorney, I spoke to my recruiter at BCG Attorney Search and discussed my concerns about continuing with the profession. My recruiter, like most BCG recruiters, was a former attorney for a large firm and had the same concerns about the profession that I had. In response, my recruiter offered me a position with BCG, and at first I laughed. I thought it was a very sweet gesture, but surely I couldn't "downgrade" my profession after working so hard. Over the next couple of months, I thought about it, and as you can see, I took a chance and am now far happier than I ever would have been practicing as an attorney. Before making the decision to jump ship and enter another profession, I considered the following:

My motivation in going to law school

Like many who end up in law school, I went for some of the most ridiculous reasons. It happened by a process of elimination: I did not want to be in the medical profession, getting a Ph.D. took too long, I had no interest in going to business school...What does that leave? Law school. Hey, why not? I liked philosophy, and my dad told me I would meet a good husband in law school and it would open me to more opportunities. While the former didn't hold true, he was right about the latter. If it weren't for law school, I would not have the opportunity to be working at BCG.

I've interviewed countless other attorneys and have found that those who had a legitimate reason for [going to law school](#) are much more likely to enjoy practicing law. If you were someone who: (1) went to law school

wanting to be a lawyer, (2) has a close relative (usually a parent) who is a lawyer and knew what they were getting into, (3) has an interest in politics, and/or (4) wanted to change current law, then you are probably in the right profession. Of course, motivations can change after law school, but the overwhelming number of well-adjusted attorneys continue to find their work interesting and challenging because they have been working toward a goal for so long and still feel that they have more to accomplish in their field. If you started law school unsure of whether or not you wanted to accomplish anything as an attorney in the first place, the chances are low that the work will excite you.

What motivates me?

You need to be honest with yourself and find out what motivates you. While at work, see what stokes your fire. Is it money? Power? Prestige? Intellectually stimulating work? A desire to help people? Client contact? Giving back to society? Advancing the cause of justice? Persuasive writing?

I found that money did not motivate me, but then again, I only have to support myself. Of course, everyone needs money and I would only work if I could make a certain amount, but it wasn't my primary concern. More important to me were the need to feel independent and be respected by my peers and superiors, and I also need to be in a supportive environment.

If you are considering other professions, talk to people in those fields and determine what drives those people and keeps them going back to work every day. Compare these findings to what motivates you.

Do I identify with my professional peers?

Do you find that your personality and drive are similar to those that you work with? Are the people you work with the type of people you would like to associate yourself with? Attorneys in a firm environment have to be able to work with each other every day--whether it is receiving work from a partner or consulting a fellow associate, if there is no sense of camaraderie in these interactions, there is a low probability that they are something to look forward to everyday. This camaraderie usually stems from a shared sense of belonging and/or common goals, and not having anything in common can be a sign that maybe you are not cut out for the same kind of life as your professional peers.

Judging by the hours most firms require their attorneys to put in, it is safe to assume that the attorneys in your firm are going to be a significant part of your life as long as you work there. While it is not necessary to be best pals with everyone, being able to get along with your co-workers can be very important in determining whether or not you are happy in the workplace. While not having anything in common with them is a possible sign that you might consider another field, not being able to be civil with your co-workers may be a sign that you have to move firms. [Firm cultures tend to run the gamut and the attitude of your current firm may not be the best fit for you](#), but you should not necessarily take an unhappy situation to mean that you need to [change careers](#).

Now then, after asking yourself the same questions and being totally honest about your answers, you may find that your current position does not work for you. You could need to switch firms, switch practice areas, or switch professions. In the second part of this article, Ms. Spielman addresses critical questions to ask and the options available when one decides to move.