

What Should I Do if I Just Lateraled as an Attorney to a New Law Firm and Do Not Like it There? Is it Acceptable to Start Looking for a New Law Firm Right After Starting at a New Law Firm?

Question: I recently moved to a new firm, but after a few months it has become clear that there were a number of misrepresentations regarding the position. I am not happy with the situation, and want to move on, but since I just recently made the move, am I stuck? Will other firms even consider me?

Answer:

If you are in the hunt for a new job (or sometimes even if you aren't), [you may encounter an opportunity that seems like the perfect fit](#), or at least good enough that you are excited to give it a shot. As a young associate, a partner you particularly like working for may decide to switch firms and ask you to come with them to the new firm. If you are a mid-level candidate with excellent credentials and experience but are concerned about partnership opportunities at your current firm, you may find yourself looking into another firm who promises a shorter path on the partnership track.

Even if you are happy where you are, it is never a bad thing to research and explore these types of opportunities. It is even good to do this even if you only want to stay informed about the state of the legal market in your current or future area of expertise. You never know when your situation may change, and it is a good idea to have a sense of your potential value on the open market.

If you do choose to explore a new opportunity, it can often turn out to be a very good thing. [You can gain experience on different types of cases, learn from and be mentored by new attorneys with a different outlook](#), or even just be refreshed by the excitement of the switch and taking on the challenge.

Like anything, however, there is a dark side to this process. It is rare but does occasionally happen that an attorney will find him or herself in a new position where the reality of the situation is far, if not entirely divorced, from what was initially represented or promised to them during the search, interview, and offer phase. Much like the candidate who asked the question above, I have a couple of friends who have found themselves in less-than-ideal situations soon after having made a job switch.

One followed a partner he liked to a new firm, but due to a lack of available work from that partner he was stuck exclusively on cases with a different partner who turned out to be entirely unpleasant to work with. Another friend joined a firm as a staff associate with the promise that she would be made a full associate after the first review period - two positive review periods came and went, and she was still a staff associate at a substantially reduced salary. [A third friend specifically left one big firm to be a staff associate at a different firm for reduced pay in exchange for a lower billable hours requirement to achieve a better work/life balance.](#) After a full nine months of 200+ hours per month due to the workload he was assigned, it became clear that the contracted arrangement for more manageable hours was illusory.

Back to the original point, if you find yourself in a similar position, it is certainly reasonable to want to start your search again. However, it is absolutely true that firms are less likely to consider, or will at least be very wary of a candidate with multiple moves on their resume.

[Pretend you are a hiring partner at a large law firm.](#) The hiring process is time consuming and expensive - filling the position of even a basic associate involves reviewing hundreds of resumes, scheduling interviews with your firm's busy attorneys (who are not billing client work if they are interviewing prospective hires), and

running conflict checks, not to mention the logistics and expense on the human resources end (benefit enrollment, preparing an office, training, etc.). And once you have that new attorney, it takes them time to get up to speed on their caseload, some of which might not be billed to the client depending on that attorney's experience level. Regardless of any given candidate's superstar credentials, you want someone who will stick around so you aren't repeating the same process a year or two later. You should be able to understand at this point why multiple moves on a resume might raise a red flag, [or at least make a hiring partner somewhat wary of that particular candidate](#).

If you are the candidate with that resume, and especially if you have made a move very recently, you may not be entirely stuck where you are. However, you are likely at a considerable disadvantage due to the above considerations on the part of hiring partners. One option is, of course, to stick it out and try to make the best of your current situation. If you are reading this far into the article, however, it is probably because that option has little to no appeal.

The other option is to start the search process now, regardless of whether you will be able to move right away, and I would highly recommend engaging the services of a good legal recruiter. A good recruiter will provide you with an honest evaluation of your situation and potential chances. Even if your recruiter advises you that waiting a little longer will be better or even necessary, establishing this relationship as soon as possible will expedite the application process when opportunities arise or it makes sense to move forward with your search. [A good recruiter will also be able to help you get a better look from firms by writing a strong cover letter on your behalf, specifically one that helps explain your moves](#) (and your desire for a new job) in the best light possible. Much like writing a persuasive brief for a court, you and your recruiter must always be 100% honest with any potential employer, but presenting things in the right way can make all the difference in the world.

In sum, if you have recently made a move or have a series of moves on your resume, moving forward and getting consideration from new employers may be more difficult, but no matter what your situation there is always a way to improve your odds.

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