

What to Consider When Weighing a Law Firm Offer?

Question:

I just received an offer from a well-regarded large law firm in Houston. I am excited about the offer, but I know that there are only so many jumps I can make before people start to look negatively upon my resume. I've already moved twice. My current position is good, but not great. I believe the perfect position is out there, but it's hard to know whether this is the one. What, in your opinion, are some important considerations to consider when weighing a law firm offer?

Answer:

Deciding whether to accept a law firm offer can be nerve-wracking, especially when the law firm has given you a deadline by which to respond. While there are undoubtedly many questions to ask yourself when considering an offer, I believe it is most important to focus on four overall questions:

Do you feel a positive gut instinct about this firm and the offer?

Are you excited about the opportunity?

Do you feel that this firm offers you an opportunity that is better than your current situation?

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 a lot of factors come into play, and you should be extremely cautious, especially if you have already made a lot of career moves. I developed this questionnaire and worksheet as a tool that may help delineate your goals and help answer your question of whether this law firm offer is the right one for you.

OFFER ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Personality Considerations

Does the firm generally share your beliefs/attitude on 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 others 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 the same work ethic as your own?

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 partner at the same time? Will there be several associates ultimately competing for one partnership spot?

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

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

Do the Dollars Make Sense?

Does this firm offer a pay-raise over your current situation? Is the salary equivalent, or is it a pay decrease?

Are you being "slotted" at an appropriate level for your graduation year? Do you have to take a step back on 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, but instead think of 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 this city.

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.)

Practice Area Considerations

Will new learning opportunities be available to you?

Will the opportunity expand the breadth of your experience?

Does the offer give you the opportunity to work in your desired practice area?

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

Will there be an opportunity for you to explore new and interesting practice areas in addition to your own? Is this important to you?

Is there 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?

Possible In-House Opportunities in the Future

Do corporations like to hire from this particular law firm?

Are there 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 a small firm?

Is it important to you for your firm to have a national presence? International presence? 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?

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

Prestige

Is the firm ranked on [the Am Law 100](#)? 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 offices?

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 a 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 a great deal of 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 be 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 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 concepts 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?

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