

## *Real Estate and Transactional Attorneys In Demand In Chicago- An Interview with Legal Recruiter Julie Lehrman*

The current Chicago market for real estate and transactional attorneys is very strong. Attorneys in these practice areas are in high demand, and as the economy continues to recover, this demand will certainly increase. This is great news for these attorneys, as many of them were laid off in the last four years, and those who remain have been overworked and unable to advance their careers.

As the economy slowly recovers, companies are beginning to conduct serious business again, and that includes mergers, acquisitions, and large real estate deals. In order to complete these transactions, [real estate and corporate attorneys are required](#), but firms are finding that, due to the economy's downturn over the last four years, these types of attorneys are harder to come by than they once were.

The current lack of real estate and transactional attorneys is creating an incredibly hot market for attorneys that practice in these areas, meaning that, for anyone with the appropriate skills and experience, career advancement is beckoning. It's also a great time for transactional and real estate attorneys to make [a lateral move](#), either to a larger market, a smaller market, or just some city where they may be interested in living.

Julie Lehrman is an attorney and [legal recruiter](#) for BCG Attorney Search, the world's leading legal recruiting firm. She discussed the economy's role in the overall legal market, the circumstances relating to the current demand for real estate and transactional attorneys, and the best ways that attorneys can take advantage of the current climate to the benefit of their own careers.

To begin, please describe your experience as an attorney and how you transitioned into legal recruiting.

[I originally got into law because I wanted to become a union lawyer](#), which I did end up doing for a while. I always had an eye towards working with unions and law firms servicing unions. I earned my J.D. at [Georgetown University Law Center](#) in Washington D.C., but after I graduated, I didn't start with a union right away. I initially went to work for a prestigious litigation boutique (it was then called Shea & Gardner, now Goodwin Procter, LLP) with about 80 lawyers, and focused on commercial litigation.

I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. Like many Midwestern towns in the 70's and 80's, it was a union town, but it really isn't that way anymore. And it was the presence of unions in my early life that led to my desire to work in union law. In my own career, I started by practicing general litigation for awhile rather than jumping right to labor. After three years at the general commercial litigation firm, I finally joined a union as Assistant Counsel.

For a lawyer, Washington D.C. has a lot of unique opportunities that are really only available there, and one of those opportunities is to work for headquarters of a national labor union. I was fortunate enough to be able to do that, and I loved it while I was there. The work was amazing, including litigating constitutional issues before the Supreme Court.

Eventually, for family reasons, I moved to Chicago. When I first arrived here, I went to work for the management side, representing companies rather than workers. I did that for about two years, but based on my lifestyle and family, I decided against making a run for partner. It just didn't fit the plans I had made for my life.

[Once I decided I didn't want to work towards becoming a partner at a law firm, I interviewed just about anybody I could get my hands on to learn about other careers that utilize a law degree.](#) I realized that legal

recruiting really fit my people skills. I have a need to talk to and get to know people, and have variety in my day, and I could do both as a recruiter.

As someone who has been in Chicago for less than a decade, what are your thoughts on the city and its legal market?

I love Chicago, and I'm here to stay. This is my town! I currently live downtown, which is great, because I'm right in the middle of a wonderful city with so much to take advantage of. Chicago is just a much, much larger and more cosmopolitan version of the Midwestern city I grew up in. There is so much culture here, so much diversity, and so many different things to do. From an attorney's perspective, a very high level of law is practiced here, and that is really attractive to me. We have a lot of very sophisticated practices in Chicago which is nice.

I feel like [corporate practice](#) is pretty prominent in this city. There is more of an international corporate practice here in Chicago, while other cities in the Midwest tend to be more local in their practice. People looking for a global practice come to Chicago. Compared to DC, Los Angeles, and New York City- I don't know that Chicago has a specialization the way other cities do. Chicago just gets everything, a lot of international business law, high level real estate, far reaching litigation; there's just a lot of variety, and I like that.

What type of attorneys do you place?

I work with people in just about every practice area. I can place any kind of lawyer as long as they have what I'm looking for. Who I can place and where depends on the current market and on the job, but generally speaking I work mostly with associates. I'm looking specifically for high quality credentials and a lot of longevity. I find it hard to work with candidates who have had several jobs within a short period of time. I like to work with people who have shown dedication and loyalty to previous employers. It also helps if a candidate has ties to the market in which they are looking. But there isn't really one particular thing I'm looking for in all candidates. It is my job to figure out what each attorney has and if they fit within a certain client's parameters.

I understand that certain areas of practice are in very high demand right now in Chicago and the Midwest. Can you tell me what these practices are and little bit about them?

Real estate law is definitely one of these areas. My colleagues at BCG Attorney Search and I are having great success placing candidates with a real estate background. Corporate lawyers too. Real estate and corporate attorneys are exploding right now, because there is something similar happening with both industries.

When the economy took a hit in 2008 and 2009, work really died off for real estate and transactional attorneys. Associates in particular were mostly laid off. The majority of those laid off dropped out of [practicing law](#), but a few lucky ones were able to continue practicing. Right now, there are a lot of entry-level associates and junior partners in these fields, but very few mid-level associates. When the financial crisis hit, if any real estate or transactional attorneys were not already on track to make partner, most were let go. This was three, four and five years ago.

The drought for real estate and corporate attorneys was so long and sustained, that many lawyers practicing in this area didn't stick around. And now that work is picking up in these areas, there are very few people left to do that work. All over the region I service, which includes Chicago, the Midwest, and the Rocky Mountains, firms are looking very hard for real estate and corporate attorneys.

Was this lack of work for real estate and corporate attorneys tied to the economy?

It was the direct result of the downturn in the economy. Because the economy was hurting, there were no mergers and acquisitions, no real estate deals and absolutely no real estate finance. There was a time when you really started seeking only real estate divestitures, and all the corporate associates started shifting to restructuring work; it was depressing. And then, there was just nothing. These areas just completely fell apart for reasons that are obvious.

Has the climate improved for these types of attorneys?

It has. I think it's just because the economy is getting a little bit better. Companies are merging again, companies are acquiring other companies again, companies are expanding again. We're seeing more real estate deals again. It's not on the scale it was before, but there is work again for corporate transactional and real estate attorneys. There is actually a lot of transactional real estate coming back again where, for a few years, it had really died off.

I see a lot more real estate deal work happening. There are more demands for financing as well. For a while, it was near impossible for companies to get loans for development and acquisitions, and when there's no financing, there are no deals. No one could get any money. The recent demand for real estate [finance attorneys](#) suggests that people think they can get money again. We're seeing the wheels slowly start turning again.

And it's not just in the Midwest and the Rockies. I'm hearing the same thing from my BCG Attorney Search colleagues from around the country. We're all placing a lot of these attorneys. They are easy to place; it's just hard to find them! There aren't that many still out there looking for new jobs. I would definitely be able to place more of them if I had more of them to place.

This type of practice is definitely coming back, and I think we are just going to see it get stronger. Attorneys practicing real estate and corporate transactional law became very desirable again in the summer of 2012; we had started to see signs of it at the beginning of the year 2012.

Are firms in Chicago, the Midwest, and the Rocky Mountain areas looking to bring in real estate and transactional attorneys from other parts of the country?

Absolutely! Any attorney in these practice areas that has a tie to a particular city, especially in smaller markets, has a good shot at getting placed. Associates who have sophisticated corporate and real estate experience are definitely in high demand.

Times are hard, and law firms don't want someone who is going to take a job in a small market and hate living there. They don't want to invest in and train people who are only taking a job in that market because they need a job. I have seen that in this economy. An attorney will take any job that's available, move across the country, and then hate it. The law firm hates it. It's a bad match. [Law firms don't want people constantly looking for a different job that will take them back home. They want people who really want to be there in that market.](#) At the end of the day, most law firms want their employees to be happy. This tie is especially important in smaller markets like Indianapolis, Kansas City and St. Louis. Firms don't want to invest the money in you and just have you take off.

This is something I see a lot less of in Chicago, because it's a bigger market and a bigger city. Firms expect people to come to Chicago. Again, any tie to Chicago is helpful, but less required because it is a larger city.

Generally, people want to move, people are constantly moving. BCG Attorney Search is a national recruiting

firm, and all of our recruiters work together. So if we get, for example, a candidate who doesn't care where they live, I'll try to find that candidate a position in my areas, our LA office will try to get them a position in California, our Atlanta office will try to place them in the South, etc.

As long as the economy continues on the upswing, I have a feeling that real estate and corporate attorneys will continue to be in demand. Hopefully, fingers crossed, things will continue to get better.

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**[21 Major Interview Mistakes to Avoid at All Costs](#)**

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**[How to Talk About Other Interviews in Your Interviews](#)**

**[How to Answer the Tell Me About Yourself Interview Question](#)**

**[How to Answer the Do You Have Any Questions for Me Interview Question](#)**