

How Soon Should I Start My Lateral Job Search?

Question: Now that it's almost a new year, I'd like to begin a job search to lateral to another firm. Understandably, I don't want to miss out on receiving my year-end bonus. I'm concerned, however, because our firm doesn't distribute bonuses until March. Is it too soon to begin a job search now, knowing that I won't realistically be able to move until mid- to late March at the earliest?

Answer: Thank you for your question. The short answer is "No! You can start looking right away!" As you may imagine, this issue comes up frequently at the end of every calendar year. As we transition into the New Year, many associates begin to contemplate changing firms and assessing options. The reasons for these moves vary but there is almost always the concern that the hard-earned bonus will be lost if [the associate leaves too soon--or that their potential new employer won't want to wait the months it will take for the bonus to be distributed at the associate's current firm](#). The good news is that law firms (and most other employers) understand this concern and are usually able to work with the associate so that all parties get their needs met. First, time is on your side in this instance. [Law firms often take several weeks--if not a couple of months to go through the posting, interview, conflicts check, and hiring process](#). Second, law firms understand that the beginning of any new year means that associates are often in a holding pattern; they expect that their potential new hires will wait until they receive their bonuses to make a move and can help map out a realistic time frame for the new start date. Third, if the employer is hiring on a fast track process and they need the associate right away, they will often offer some sort of compensation incentive to make up for the lost bonus. So go ahead and begin your search now! [The months of February and March are usually the busiest times of the year for lateral associate activity. Getting the jump on your search will only benefit you in the long run.](#)

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