

## *What Factors Should I Consider When Thinking of Moving from a Big Downtown Firm to a Smaller One?*

**Question:** I work downtown, but I am considering an opportunity at a firm closer to my home in the suburbs. What factors should I be considering?

**Answer:** I talk to many associates in large cities who have to commute long distances in order to reach their large firm's location downtown. [Living in the suburbs has its appeal for many attorneys, but large firms still tend to be located in the city center in most metropolitan areas.](#) Therefore, a [move to a firm in the suburbs](#) requires careful consideration for several reasons.

*First:* Firms in the suburbs tend to be smaller in size and often service a more local clientele. This means several things for you as a lawyer. It means that the type of work will be very different, and it also means that your role may change significantly. You will not be working for the huge clients that you have perhaps grown accustomed to in the large firm. In addition, the level of sophistication may also be reduced. Similarly, smaller firms are almost always more leanly staffed than large firms, so you may get more responsibility earlier in your career. If you are a junior attorney, you may find yourself thrown into the fire. If you are an attorney seeking more hands-on experience, then a suburban firm may be just what you are seeking. However, if you find that you need more experience under your belt before you truly have the confidence to run with the ball, a small firm in the suburbs may overwhelm you.

*Second:* As a [suburban lawyer](#), you will likely be required to cultivate your own business sooner rather than later. Smaller firms tend to operate on a much more hand-to-mouth basis than larger firms. This means that, unlike large firms, you will probably not be able to make partner while servicing someone else's clients for your entire career. If you are the type of person who naturally has many connections and wants to cultivate business, you may be extremely [successful at a small firm](#). It also means that if you show an early aptitude for cultivating business, you may make partner much sooner than at a large firm. It is important to ask yourself what kind of lawyer you are or hope to be before you make this transition.

*Third:* You may find it challenging to transition back to a [large firm](#) after working at a small suburban firm (for the same reason as it is very hard to go back to a large law firm after working in-house). Choosing a small firm in the suburbs sends a clear signal that you want a steadier, more predictable, and perhaps more comfortable life. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this choice, but you should do your best to ensure that it is the right choice for you in the long term. It tells the large firms that you chose your position in part for the lifestyle, a choice which large firms tend to frown upon. Once you leave a large, downtown firm, it is unlikely that you can ever go back.

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