

How Soon Can a Junior Attorney Leave Their First Law Firm Job? Four Important Questions to Answer for Junior Attorneys Considering Looking for a New Job

Question: *I graduated from Columbia and have been working as a corporate lawyer in a big downtown firm for the last six months. For personal reasons (my significant other, whom I met only a couple of months before graduating from law school), I want to move to the Bay Area as soon as possible. I have several questions:*

Will the fact that I am [leaving a law firm](#) after such a short time make it very difficult for me to find a new job?

Should I provide details as to the reasons for my plans in the cover letter that I am sending to law firms on the West Coast?

Do I have to disclose information about the law firm I am working at right now when I am interviewing in the West Coast?

How long before I plan to leave should I give a notice to my current law firm?

Answer: Your questions are fairly easy and straightforward to answer but, before I do, let me play devil's advocate for a moment.

You met your significant other about 8 months ago. [You have told us that this individual is on the West Coast and that you work at a major law firm in New York.](#) Since about 3000 miles separate the two of you and, more than likely you don't have a tremendous amount of free time, I can't imagine that the two of you see one another that frequently. Do you really know one another well enough to uproot yourself and move to California?

Look, I really don't want to get into your personal life, but you should make sure that you know what you are getting into before you decide to make such a big move. Eight months of a long distance romance may seem like an eternity, but have you truly spent enough time with this person to know for sure that you are ready to move to the Bay Area just for him or her? Have you spent much time in San Francisco? [If something should happen with your relationship, would you still want to live there?](#) Are you aware that San Francisco is even more expensive to live in than New York City? Have you floated the idea of moving to the left coast by your friends and family? What are their thoughts?

Hopefully you have given this type of career and life affecting decision great thought. [After careful deliberation if you know that this is the right thing to do at this time, let's now discuss how to handle your search for a new job and subsequent notice to your current law firm.](#)

1. Yes, leaving a firm after six months will be a bit more difficult to explain than leaving after two or three years. First of all, there are not as many opportunities out there just yet for first years. However, within the next couple of months there will be more and more jobs for first-year associates and by the time the fall rolls around, you will have many different law firm opportunities to pursue. The good news for you is that you are looking for a job in a completely different geographical location and so it does not look as strange as it would if you were leaving one New York firm for another in just six months.

2. What kind of details do you intend to put into your cover letter? Do you really think it is professional and appropriate to write about your personal relationship with your significant other? I think that you will put yourself in a difficult position if you inform potential employers that you want to move across the country because of a fairly new love interest. All you have to say in the cover letter is that you are planning to move to

the Bay Area by such and such a date. Of course, once you start interviewing, you need to be ready to discuss why you are planning this move. California is a very transient state and many employers are wary about hiring people who have just moved there. You will certainly be talking about your personal relationship in any interview, but I advise you to also know why you like the Bay Area and why any particular firm is of interest to you. You need to have a good solid understanding of any potential employer's firm and practice departments prior to going on the interview.

By the way, have you signed up for the California bar? If not, you had better do so right away. It is far too late to take the February bar, but this a great time to sign up and start thinking about the July bar. Any potential California employers will find your moving intentions to be far more sincere if you are ready to sit for their state bar.

3. What kind of information do you think you have to disclose about your current employer? I am confused by this question. Hopefully you are aware [that you need to submit a resume that has your current employer](#) and dates of employment listed on it. You also need a paragraph or two addressing the substantive nature of your work. Once you are interviewing, the questions about your employment with your firm and the type of work that you are doing will be much more in-depth.

Any normal or typical interviewing questions about your firm and your relationship with your employer need to be addressed in a straightforward, thorough and concise manner. If you think the questions are illegal or unethical, you naturally do not need to answer them, but I can't imagine that you would want to work for a firm that asks any questions that fall under the categories of illegal or unethical. Other than that, if you are interested in a particular firm, I advise you to be open to any questions about your current employer and your work that might be asked. If you are worried about keeping your search confidential, make sure that you [let any interviewer know that your current law firm does not know of your intentions to move at this time](#). (By the way, does your firm have a Bay Area office? If so, make sure you sit down with your firm's recruiting coordinator to see if there are any opportunities in the West Coast office).

See [Guidelines on Reciprocity or "Admission On Motion" among the States as per American Bar Association](#) for more information.

4. [Giving notice](#) at your level has a fairly standard amount of time. You owe your current employer two to three weeks of notice. However, you do need to remember that when you are determining a start date for your new employer, you need to factor in not only the two to three weeks' notice but also one to two weeks to pack up and move to your new home. If the new firm is amenable, you might want to add one more week to this schedule to allow yourself time to settle in and unpack. Just be careful that you don't delay that start date too much as the new firm might feel that you are not that anxious to get on with your practice.

Whatever you decide to do with your career, I wish you all the best!

Summary: *For personal reasons, I want to move to the Bay Area from New York City as soon as possible. I have several questions about this process.*

See the following articles for more information:

[What Do You Need to Know If You Are Planning a Move to the West Coast?](#)

[How to Relocate to Another Part of the Country as an Attorney](#)

[Consider Both the Specific Legal Market and the Cost of Living When Making a Geographical Move](#)

[Click Here to Let Us Answer Your Legal Career Question](#)