

Job Hopping: The Death of Legal Careers

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It is not unusual today for associates to work at two or three law firms before "settling down." If you find yourself, however, having worked at three law firms within your first four or five years as an associate and looking again to make a move, you may be branded a job-hopper. If this happens, you risk becoming no longer marketable as an attorney. Making or trying to make too many lateral moves can result in firms thinking, among other things, that your work is mediocre, that you do not work well with others, and/or that you are not happy in your job and will not be happy anywhere. Therefore, while lateral moves have become common, they must also be sensible.

[Part of my job as a recruiter, is to make sure that the attorneys I place at a new firm are going to that firm for the right reasons.](#) Another part of my job as a recruiter is to explain to firms why my candidates want and should make a lateral move. There are many practical reasons to make a lateral move - (1) you are moving to a new geographic region, (2) there have been significant structural changes to your firm's practice group, and/or (3) you would like a change in the type of work you are doing.

People change geographic regions for all sorts of reasons, some of which include moving from a small town to a big city (or vice versa), moving closer to family and friends, and moving to accommodate a significant other. All of these are understood by firms to be worthy reasons to make a lateral move, and quite often the person interviewing you for your potential new position has had to do the same.

Significant structural changes to a firm's practice groups are not infrequent. One or more partners may retire or leave the firm. The bulk of your practice, such as litigation or real estate, may be transferred to a different firm office, leaving your practice group anemic. Wanting to continue to be busy and do complex and challenging work is a great reason to make a lateral move. Additionally, it is perfectly acceptable during an interview to state that you feel like there is no room for you to make partner at your current firm because the firm no longer has the volume of work in your practice group that would necessitate adding another partner.

Wanting a change in the type of work you are doing is probably the most common reason why attorneys seek to make a lateral move. You may want to leave litigation to do transactional work. Your firm may be partner heavy and you are not getting the quality of work you had hoped. You may be at a smaller firm that cannot handle the level of complexity and sophistication of cases on which you would like to work. You may want to leave your big firm to work at a smaller firm that focuses more on regional work, or can provide you with more of a variety of work. If it is true change in the kind of work you want to do, a move makes sense.

Firms love to bring in lateral attorneys, but they want to feel that the attorneys will make valuable contributions to the firm, and that they are not being used as a stepping stone in the attorneys' career paths. Making a lateral move may be the best move of your career; just make sure that you are making it at the right time and for the right reasons.