

## Why Attorneys Want OUT of In-House

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I speak with attorneys about their career goals on a daily basis. Especially with corporate and IP attorneys, I hear this phrase quite frequently, "I would really like to go in-house." It's terrific to have a career plan and ultimate goals, but I also speak with attorneys on the other side of this coin. These are attorneys that have gone in-house too early in their careers and are looking to transition back into law firm life. Why would these attorneys want to go back to law firms after landing the "dream" in-house position?

**Money.** There is no question about it, most law firms pay very well. While corporations may try to compete with compensation, the base pay can be significantly lower than an attorney would make at an AM LAW 200 firm. Some companies will try to lure these top attorneys with guaranteed or discretionary bonuses, but these may come in a lump sum and not in a consistent paycheck. These bonuses also may be the first on the cutting board, should the company hit a financial slump.

**Hours.** Most attorneys believe that if they move in-house, their job will be less demanding (more of a nine to five). This is not always the case. Attorneys that have moved in-house often complain that they are working just as many hours as they were a law firm, and not being compensated for it.

**Upward Mobility.** At some point, successful lawyers have to become entrepreneurs. If they can navigate the business aspect of law and build their own practice, the sky is the limit with respect upward mobility within the law firm environment (and high end compensation). When some attorneys transition to an in-house, they experience a sort of "ceiling" and find they can only move up within the company in a limited way. With multiple "Assistant Vice Presidents," typically someone has to move *out* for the attorney to move *up*.

**The practice of law.** Believe it or not, many attorneys really like the practice of law. That's hopefully why they decided to enter the profession. One of the most common complaints I hear when speaking with an attorney that took an in-house position, is that *they miss the practice of law*. They miss being a lawyer. While there is still some law involved, most in-house positions are heavily weighted toward administrative tasks. The day to day issues are not as challenging and attorneys can start to feel complacent or bored.

**After being in-house, lateraling back to a law firm can be a difficult feat.** Firms generally seek attorneys with strong law firm experience. If an attorney went in house too early in their career, they will not likely have been able to keep up the skills that are attractive to firms. If they receive an offer, they will probably be asked to discount their year-level. Additionally, the firm will always question the decision to go in-house and commitment to a law firm environment.

For more senior attorneys, whatever business they may have built while at a firm is lost once they accept an in-house position. It can be difficult to re-build a practice that took years to amass. At a certain seniority level, an attorney's business is one of their most marketable elements.

There are absolutely situations where attorney make the jump to in-house, are perfectly happy, and would never think about returning to law firm life. Is that you?

Just a caution to those that are considering the leap: honestly evaluate your career goals. The in-house move can be a much bigger long-term decision than many attorneys realize.