

## *Develop a Niche*

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### **Develop a Niche**

By Paul Danielson - Recruiter

We see many resumes from attorneys who are 7-10 years into their career and are in the unfortunate position of needing [to find another job](#) because their tenure at their current firm is running short due to the typical "up-or-out" policy and the fact that they have not developed a client base.

In most cases, these attorneys will have an extremely difficult time finding a lateral position at another law firm for the exact same reasons they are being pushed out of their current firm: a law firm is a business, and it is not sustainable for the firm to pay a senior-associate salary to an attorney who is merely billing work for a partner rather than generating their own business. Additionally, the increased billing rates for each additional year of experience means that the type of work that you could previously use to fill your hours as a junior or mid-level associate (document review, 50-state surveys, due diligence, preparing deposition outlines) will become less available since clients balk at paying higher rates for a senior associate to do the work a more junior associate is fully capable of performing.

The best way to prevent yourself from falling into the "up-or-out" trap where lateral opportunities become scarce or nonexistent a decade into your career is to develop business. Now, this is much easier said than done, and even long-time partners can have difficulty developing and maintaining a client base significant enough to sustain their practice, much less make them an attractive lateral candidate. So what are your other options?

[Many attorneys look to go in-house](#), but those positions can be just as difficult to come by since they are so desirable and competition for them is fierce. Similarly, if you have not been developing business, it is likely that a big part of that problem is that you have not been networking and developing strong contacts, which is how the vast majority of attorneys who move in-house learn about and interview for their in-house positions. I have written before on the importance of networking, but it is one of those things that is nearly impossible to overemphasize in terms of how important it is to your long-term legal career.

The other option is to develop a niche practice. We have had quite a bit of success placing more senior attorneys who [lack a portable book of business](#) but have significant experience and expertise in a niche area of law. If a firm has an existing client base that is in need of this expertise, it may be worth it for the firm to bring on an expert practitioner in the area in order to keep that part of the client's business within their firm, rather than having to refer it to a competing firm who will likely try to poach the entirety of that client's business.

Again, the opportunities are not as frequent or as easy to obtain as a general lateral opportunity for a candidate with a portable book, but it will significantly increase your attractiveness to potential new firms if you have a specialty practice that cannot be filled by a generalist or a more junior associate who lacks your level of experience.



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Thus, if you find yourself in the mid-level part of your career and you do not see yourself willing or able to develop a client base that will sustain your career moving forward, I would highly encourage you to [develop a specialty in a particular area of practice](#) within your more general field. Many senior attorneys come to us and say they can "do it all" because they have jumped from practice area to practice area, or they have taken a wide variety of general assignments from the partners at their firm simply to fill their hours requirement as they wait for the inevitable "up-or-out" push. The problem with this approach is that it puts you in a category of thousands, if not tens of thousands, of other attorneys who can also do "a bit of everything" and have no business.

If you specialize, however, you may have fewer options in terms of firms that fit your specialty, but for each of those options, you will be among a handful of attorneys who can fill those roles, and thus significantly increase your odds of finding work as you get more senior in your career.

If you already have a niche practice and are looking to make a move, or if you just want to discuss what types of specialty practices are in demand so you can plan for your future, you can always reach out to one of us at BCG.

**See [6 Things Attorneys and Law Students Need to Remove from Their Resumes ASAP If They Want to Get Jobs with the Most Prestigious Law Firms](#) for more information.**

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