

## *Hitting the Ground Walking*

Most lateral associates expect and believe that they will hit the ground running and be immediately busy, and thus immediately integrated into the practice group they are joining.

When a law firm lists an open position and attempts to hire new attorneys, by and large in the current (still cautious) economic climate, they are doing so because they have an abundance of available work, either in the form of existing matters, or ancillary matters from an existing client that the firm would like to retain but does not currently have the needed expertise to service.

Most lateral associates expect and believe that they will hit the ground running and be immediately busy, and thus immediately integrated into the practice group they are joining. If this does not happen immediately, however, it is very rarely a cause for concern.

Firms tend to take different approaches to lateral associates, depending on the level of experience and the practice group, but frequently the initial days or weeks of a new position are dedicated to getting that attorney oriented with the firm's administrative processes (training on computers, introductions to secretaries and support staff, training on firm policies, file management systems, benefits review and selection, etc.).

Additionally, if a practice group was hiring because they are incredibly busy, this may ironically lead to a delay in you receiving your first assignment(s). If a partner and associate group is swamped with a closing on a deadline, or has briefing and a trial coming up, they may simply be too focused on the immediate tasks at hand to be able to assign and oversee your first client matters. Partners under pressure and under deadlines frequently tend to assign their immediate work to their current "favorite" associates, who are known quantities, even if those associates are otherwise currently overworked. You may have to wait for a break in the action to break into the action.

Partners may also have a sense of how they will use you from the search and interview process, and you may have been selected because you can jump right in and be an immediate contributor based on your background and skill set. It is also possible that you were selected for hire because you have some of the skills needed for the current client work, but also additional impressive credentials and experience that the partners would like to utilize, but are not sure how immediately, or need to pitch the client for a new matter that you can uniquely handle.

There are some client matters where clients have only "signed off" on particular attorneys, or a particular number of attorneys, and it can take some time and effort by the partner to get another new associate approved to work on the matter. I had this happen frequently, on both sides, one occasion where I was slow and available for work but it took a couple weeks for the client to approve adding me to the already considerable roster of billing attorneys on a 50-state class action, and once where I was hit with additional assignments on top of an already massive workload because the client wanted me to handle all of the research given my existing familiarity with the case, even though there were other associates willing and able to pitch in.

If you find yourself without a lack of immediate work, and this is a concern for you because of job security reasons, the best thing you can do is to let partners know you are available, take the time and effort to introduce yourself to as many partners and associates as possible to ask what they are working on and figure out what matters you may be able to contribute to, and in the meantime perhaps write an article, do some client networking, or do other work that would be helpful to marketing efforts, raising your profile, etc.

Remember, the firm hired you for a reason, and did not bring you on to pay you a very large salary to sit on your thumbs. You will get work, even if it is not immediate, and when you do it is up to you to do the best job

you can so the work keeps coming at your [new firm](#).