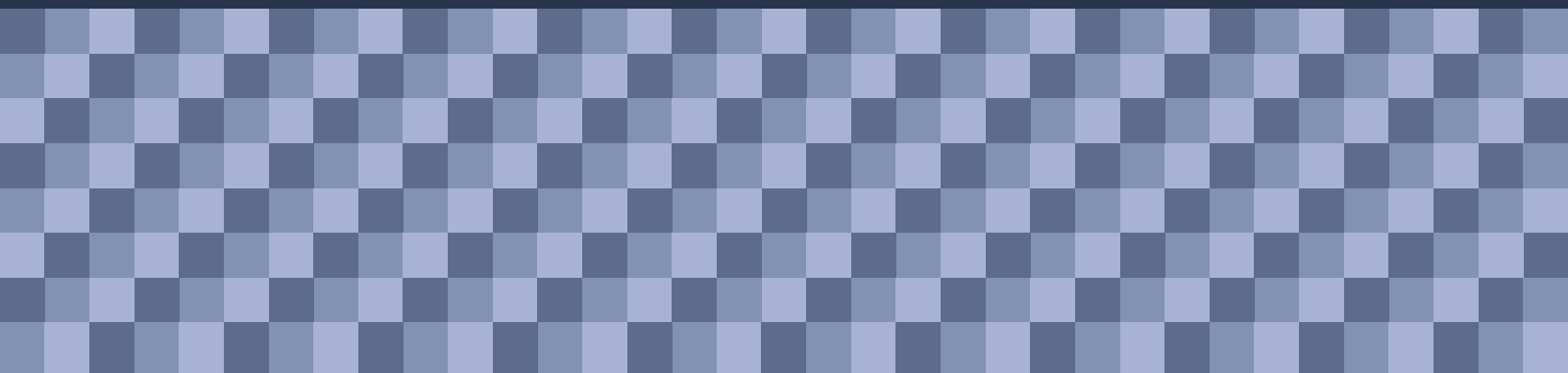


ATTORNEY SEARCH

ARTICLE OF THE WEEK

by Harrison Barnes, CEO of BCG





Why American Law Firms Prefer Hiring Australian Attorneys Over American Attorneys: What You Can Learn from Australian Attorneys about How to Succeed in American Law Firms

Summary: Find out what Australian attorneys do that makes them so attractive to law firms and what lessons you can learn from them.

Whenever the economy is doing well in the United States, American law firms start hiring Australian attorneys. Incredibly, I have seen law firms favor hiring Australian attorneys over American attorneys again and again. I regularly work with Australian attorneys and they almost always get more interviews and more offers than their American counterparts. They get jobs with the best firms. Firms simply love Australian attorneys.

In contrast, attorneys from Europe, Asia or the Middle East have very little chance of getting hired by a major United States law firm. Scores of Asian and European attorneys come to the United States each year and enroll in American law school LLM programs, yet most do not end up getting positions with American firms. They take the bar, cannot get jobs and then go home. It does not matter if they went to [Harvard](#), [Columbia](#) or the [University of Chicago](#)—they find themselves right back where they started in most instances. In contrast, virtually every major New York law firm will happily snap up Australian attorneys and the Australian attorneys end up doing very well inside these firms.

You would think, of course, that law firm hiring partners would prefer to hire people from their own countries who have gone to schools they know and have backgrounds that are more similar to theirs. But when it comes to Australian attorneys, this is just not the case!

I frequently speak with European and Asian attorneys who have been let go from law firm jobs; however, I cannot recall ever speaking with an Australian attorney who lost his or her job in an American law firm for performance or personality issues. The only times I can recall Australian attorneys being let go was as part of a mass layoff when corporate departments (where most Australian attorneys work) came to a complete standstill.

After a career of observing Australian attorneys flourish in American law firms, I have come to believe that they are more likely to get jobs and succeed because they offer a combination of traits that law firms appreciate, but that most Americans and people from other countries do not offer. They succeed for the following reasons:



1. They Feel Incredibly Lucky to Have Jobs at Elite Law Firms in the United States and Act Like It.

Most American attorneys working inside of major law firms are not that excited about it. In fact, they are likely to be unhappy about their jobs and plotting their escapes. This is a stark contrast to Australian attorneys.

Australian attorneys are generally very excited to have jobs in the United States and cannot believe how fortunate they are to be working inside of major American law firms. They feel lucky because they make far, far more money than they would earn in Australian firms and because they have the chance to experience a different culture and country. The thrill of travel is in the bones of most Australians—they love leaving Australia to explore what the world has to offer.

While American attorneys are comparing themselves to people working in hedge funds and attorneys at more prestigious firms, Australian attorneys could often care less about other people. They are here to do the work and are excited about what they have and not worried about something else.

Hiring partners like hiring people who are excited about the job and who are grateful. When an attorney is excited about the job it improves the morale of other people in the office, makes the attorney's superiors feel good, and looks good to firm clients.

- What is wrong with being excited about a job? Nothing!
- Who would you want working for you? Someone excited about their job!

The average American attorney from an Ivy League law school working at a major law firm is generally a bit down on the circumstances he or she is in—and it shows! Not the average Australian attorney! Australian attorneys succeed and get jobs when American attorneys do not because Australian attorneys are genuinely excited about the opportunity to work wherever they get jobs.

See the following articles for more information:

- [You Need to Enjoy What You Are Doing](#)
- [Love What You Do](#)

2. Australian Attorneys Are Extremely Loyal Compared to American Attorneys

I have placed countless Australians in [law firm jobs](#) in the United States. Interestingly, these have all been initial jobs; except in cases of mass layoffs, I do not recall ever helping an Australian

attorney make a lateral move from one American law firm to another. Switching firms and looking around once they get jobs in the United States is not in the nature of Australian attorneys.

In contrast, the average American attorney is basically “always looking.” If I have 100 “cold call” conversations in a month with prospective American attorneys, these American attorneys are generally “open” to hearing about [in-house opportunities](#), better opportunities with law firms and more. When speaking with them, I rarely hear them say something like, “I feel I owe this place a lot—I am going to do everything I can to stay here and make it work.” This is just not something I hear really at all from American attorneys. Instead of hearing statements of loyalty and gratitude, I hear calculated statements like, “I am up for partner in a year and I want to see what happens...”

Whatever the cultural reasons, American attorneys are very quick to find reasons to be unhappy and switch firms. Here are some recent examples:

- An attorney who made \$280,000 a year but whose firm decided to no longer pay \$130/month for parking. This University of Chicago Law School graduate was “outraged” by this “affront” and told me that it was the “last straw” after he received a bonus of \$10,000 less than he thought he deserved.
- An attorney who noticed “a slowdown” in work and decided to switch firms. This Harvard Law School graduate was concerned that the slowdown meant the firm might collapse.
- An attorney who was in the second year of practice and “had not taken enough depositions” and wanted to go to a firm that would allow more immediate experience.
- An attorney making over \$200,000 a year with an international law firm was upset because she had to travel for business a few times a year. This [Michigan Law School](#) graduate was at one of the five largest law firms in the United States and was insulted that she needed to spend two weeks in Paris over the summer when she would have preferred to be spending time with her family on the weekends.
- An attorney from Asia at one of the five most prestigious law firms in New York who wanted to go to a more prestigious law firm. This attorney with an LLM from Harvard Law School believed it would “look better” if she worked for a more prestigious law firm. In my belief, the only firms that were arguably more prestigious were [Wachtell](#) and [Sullivan & Cromwell](#) and she desperately wanted to go there.
- An attorney making \$180,000 a year who was upset that a prominent national partner she worked for expected her to stay late when the partner left early. This [Stanford Law School](#) graduate thought that she should not be the only one staying late.
- An attorney who thought her firm was “getting boring” and felt it was time to look around. This attorney was at one of the top law firms in the Midwest, but simply wanted a change because she was “bored” with her firm.



These are literally the sorts of reasons many American attorneys start looking around. In contrast, if you cold call an Australian attorney, while that attorney will be quite friendly, the conversation will be quite different. More likely than not the attorney will say something like, “Thanks for calling mate! It sounds like a good opportunity, but I am going to ‘give it a go’ here.” Almost all of them say some version of this statement when you are trying to recruit them. They are much, much more loyal than American attorneys or the average Asian or European attorney.

The Australian attorney may not be incredibly happy in his or her current position, but the attorney’s psychology seems to demand loyalty, because the attorney values his or her firm and the people there. Australian attorneys feel incredibly grateful to have jobs to begin with and, as far as they are concerned, there are not a lot of differences between law firms anyway.

When an attorney is perceived as loyal and grateful, that attorney is more likely to be trusted, advanced and allowed to interact with important clients and others. Many law firms shield attorneys from clients because they are afraid they will say negative things about the firm, try to angle for an [in-house job](#), or even try and steal the clients.

When I am speaking with senior associates without business, generally around half of them will say something like, “I am the one the client deals with the most and if I left I am pretty sure I could get this client and few others to come with me.” I have never heard this sort of thing from an Australian attorney—but most Australian attorneys never look around to begin with and have no interest in biting the hand that feeds them.

The bottom line is that the Australian attorneys are more loyal to their employers when they are in the United States and this loyalty makes them better hires.

3. Australian Attorneys Have Nowhere Else to Go and Know They Need to Commit, Make It Work or Return to Australia

Because they need to get work visa sponsorship and so forth, once Australian attorneys are hired in the United States it is extremely difficult for them to switch law firms. Law firms generally do not want to go through this hassle. Hiring a lateral attorney from a foreign country from another law firm in the United States is just something American law firms do not do a lot of. Australian attorneys generally get “one shot” and have to make it work.

Australian lawyers know that their odds of lateralling to other firms are quite slim, so they generally commit once they are hired. Commitment is extremely important for attorneys, and this commitment is manifested in how they do assignments, how they get along with peers and how they make efforts to fit in. The level of an attorney’s commitment has a huge impact on the attorney’s success. The more an attorney commits the more the attorney is likely to succeed.

- See [The #1 Attorney Career Killer That Attorneys Are Never Taught](#) for more information.

Law firms calculate that hiring an Australian attorney is a good choice because the attorney will have a difficult time making a lateral move anywhere else. Who better to invest your time and training into than someone who is unlikely to leave and cannot go anywhere else? If a law firm had to choose between two attorneys to train and introduce to clients—an attorney who had nowhere else to go or an attorney who was likely to leave—which attorney do you think the law firm would choose?

For Australian attorneys, the alternative to succeeding at their firms in the United States is going home. Once home, they will face far lower salaries, not as sophisticated work, and (for most Australians) a life that is not as exciting as living and working in the United States.

On the other hand, American attorneys have all sorts of alternatives like going to different firms, taking [in-house positions](#), moving to [government jobs](#) and so forth. If a law firm hires a graduate of Yale or Harvard Law School right out of school, for example, the firm is generally setting itself up for certain “failure” because all of the time it invests in training and developing this attorney is likely to go to waste; the attorney will simply leave and go to another job. This is not good business for most law firms and they can avoid these problems by hiring Australian lawyers.

4. Australian Attorneys Are Very Social and Easy to Get Along With

Many American attorneys limit their socializing with colleagues and clients and others in their law firms. American attorneys are often extremely competitive with colleagues and some even hope their colleagues will fail. The other day I spoke with a Columbia Law School graduate who had left a big New York firm after six years and was looking for a \$25/hour job answering legal questions on a law information hotline. “Working in a law firm and around those people makes me a bitch!” she said. “All of my friends from law school who are still working are bitches and completely different. I want nothing to do with this anymore.”

The work environment of American law firms generally turns American attorneys into unhappy people, but this does not happen with Australian attorneys. Whatever the negativity of the environment, Australians will generally thrive and uplift those around them. Australian attorneys love socializing and seem continually upbeat and happy.

They work very hard; however, they are also extremely social with colleagues and with each other. There are huge groups of Australian attorneys in New York who are always getting together and having fun. Australians enjoy going out with people from work, enjoy meeting clients and generally enjoy having a very good time with colleagues, clients and others. They always seem to have well-developed and supportive social structures (with other Australians) whereas Americans do not.

This sort of camaraderie is the sort of thing that you generally do not see with American attorneys. American attorneys often avoid other attorneys they work with, as they feel these other attorneys are out to hurt them. Moreover, other attorneys—even from other law firms—are reminders of stressful work and are best avoided.

The idea of having fun, enjoying people from work, seeking companionship, liking other people and wanting to socialize is something that is a good thing in the work environment. Americans often bring each other down. Many attorneys from Asia and Europe will not socialize much either. Europeans working inside American law firms are often quite negative. In contrast, Australians are often bubbling with enthusiasm for socializing.

Law firms are businesses and want people around who raise the morale of others, and who are likely to make clients happy. Australians generally offer all of this and that is why most hiring partners will choose an Australian attorney over an American attorney.

5. Most Australians Seem to Understand That the Law Firm World Is All a Game and Are Amused By It in Contrast to Having Dark Feelings About It

Instead of taking what goes on inside of law firms personally (the crazy hours, the backstabbing and the competition among attorneys), Australian attorneys are more likely to be amused. Australian attorneys seem to view the “goings on” inside of law firms in an amused and detached way. They understand that there are rules and things that they need to do in order to succeed and they figure out and follow them instead of just viewing them with negativity.

Additionally, because they are so profoundly social as compared to Americans, law firm managers generally view Australian attorneys in a more positive manner and they are less likely to get in trouble with office politics. Moreover, they have access to information from being so social and this information gives them an edge, because knowing what higher ups and others are thinking has profound advantages in a law firm.

While Australian attorneys keep a level head inside these incredibly demanding environments, others are continually quitting, cracking up, going to in-house positions and so forth. Australian attorneys keep on chugging along. The ability to view everything as a game and the people in the law firm as characters in the game makes the law firm an almost humorous place to work for many Australian attorneys. When I speak with Australian attorneys about the dark, demanding environments inside of law firms they are more likely to be laughing about them than getting upset by them.

I have recently started hearing attorneys at major American law firms talk about “human rights” and “the human condition” when talking about their law firm jobs. An Australian attorney would never think like this. Australian attorneys are more easygoing and realize it is just a game. They

take their jobs seriously and work hard, but also view the characters in the firm as playing a game. In contrast, most American attorneys are likely to crack under pressure and get psyched out by what is occurring inside of the law firm.

- See [Your Job Is a Game – Make Your Opponents External](#) for more information.

6. They Are Fit, Generally Good Looking and Keep Themselves Up

This is perhaps not something I should get into because it is likely to piss off a lot of people, but my objective is to point out what makes Australian attorneys succeed. As a general rule, most Australian attorneys are fit and keep themselves up. They seem to take their appearances quite seriously.

Australian attorneys do not get extremely overweight and are generally quite presentable at all times. They do not let themselves go. The numerous Australian attorneys I have worked with are active in sports and in pursuits such as swimming, biking, basketball, tennis and so forth. Many are members of Australian sports leagues in the United States.

Many American attorneys are like this, too, but it is not coincidental that the American attorneys who are active in sports and who exercise also tend to be more successful than those who are not. This is because there is a prejudice in our society in favor of people who are fit and thin. Most actors and actresses make a concerted effort to be fit and thin. The majority of successful executives are fit and thin. Being fit and looking good is something that reflects the idea that if you are able to maintain and look after yourself well then, presumably, this is how you approach your work and other matters as well. Clients want to see people who look good and are kept up because it reflects well on them. Regardless of the political incorrectness of saying this, this is fact. Brands, companies and others want their representatives to look good.

People who are better looking and more physically fit are far more likely to get hired than a similarly positioned attorney who is not. This is important. Australian attorneys are more likely to be fit than their counterparts from America.

When a law firm interviews and hires an Australian attorney, the firm knows that it is getting a “product” that (for the most part) has certain standards for maintenance. American attorneys have these standards too, of course, but Australian attorneys are more likely to be consistent with these standards as a general rule.

See the following articles for more information:

- [Are You a Quality Product?](#)
- [Treat Yourself Like a Quality Product](#)

7. They Are Comfortable Remaining in the City They Take a Job In

Many American attorneys who take jobs in cities they are not from end up going home after a few years of practice. For example, a good proportion of American attorneys who begin their careers in New York City do not stay there. In contrast, Australian attorneys seem to rapidly settle down and develop an extensive network of friends, acquaintances and others when they take jobs in a city, and they seem to want to remain in that city. They have few aspirations of moving to another city. This makes the law firms that hire them more secure that they are safe hires and will not jump ship after the firm has spent time and resources training them and introducing them to clients. If an Australian attorney is working in Los Angeles, New York or another city, the law firm has every reason to believe that the attorney will stay there.

8. Additional Considerations

Some of these have already been mentioned, but the following attributes of Australian attorneys are so important to the reasons why they succeed in American law firms that they deserve additional mention:

- **They Are Generally Accepting of Others and More Likely to Look for Commonality than Differences.** The average Australian attorney is not overly concerned with class, school pedigree and other statistics Americans take so seriously. They are there to do a good job and that is all that matters. They get along with people and respect them regardless of where they went to school, their race, or their social class. They are accepting and not discriminatory.
- **They Are Generally Not Interested in Office Politics.** This is something that crushes many attorneys and prematurely ends many careers. Australians, in general, have no use for things that feed unhappiness and are more interested in being happy than in focusing on negativity.
- **They Work Hard, but They Moderate Their Pace and Are Not Clock Watchers.** Australians work quite hard, but at the same time they know how to look out for their mental and physical health and moderate their work accordingly. They work when they need to and as “team players” and they work without the expectation of an immediate reward.
- **They Generally Have Balanced Lives.** For the most part, Australians have balanced lives. They work hard, play hard, exercise and have active social lives (with other Australians, Americans and sex partners) outside of work. This balance makes them happy and gives them the energy to contribute inside of law firms.
- **They Are Honest and Straightforward.** Most Australians are quite honest. They are willing to call out dishonesty and in most cases do not fall on the “dark side” when it comes to covering up and cutting corners. They can be trusted. The ability to be trusted is huge and something law firms and clients appreciate.



- **They Are Eager to Please.** They approach their work with a high level of enthusiasm and want the people they are working for to appreciate what they do. They are generally eager to please and this makes a major difference in how they are viewed and contributes to their success.

Conclusions

The characteristics that most Australian attorneys display when they move to firms in the United States are the exact sorts of characteristics that would make American attorneys more successful if they displayed these characteristics as well. Attorneys who want to succeed in American law firms can learn a great deal from how Australian attorneys approach the practice of law, the people around them and their work.

If more American attorneys and attorneys from other parts of the world approached their work like the average Australian, they would be more apt to get hired and succeed. There are exceptions to Australians being successful, of course, but the culture seems to produce attorneys uniquely suited to practicing law inside of large law firms.

The market economy always teaches important lessons. Here, the market favors Australians because American firms will interview and hire well credentialed Australians over American, European and Asian attorneys, all things considered. The majority of these jobs are in corporate and the majority of firms are in New York. Nevertheless, I have seen Australian litigators experience profound success in Los Angeles and other cities. There are lessons to be learned from people who approach the practice of law a certain way and Australians have a lot to teach about how to succeed in American law firms.

[Contact Harrison](#)

Our mission is to meet or exceed every attorney's expectations for their job search and ensure they are succeeding and winning with BCG Attorney Search