

# Top 30 Factors Large Law Firms Consider When Hiring Lateral Attorneys

By A. Harrison Barnes

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# ***Top 30 Factors Large Law Firms Consider When Hiring Lateral Attorneys***

By A. Harrison Barnes

## **Summary**

Learn how big law firms evaluate potential hires and what you can do to increase your chances of getting hired by them.

Attorneys typically want their “decision” to look for a lateral position at a new firm to translate quickly into a new job. But there are numerous factors that control the speed with which an attorney will get a new position and they are beyond the control of the attorneys looking for positions. The legal market is very competitive and there are typically multiple applicants for each position. Also, each attorney has “negative weight” that will be taken more or less seriously by law firms depending on factors such as the priorities of the firms, the geographic areas, and the economy in general and in regards to certain practice areas. This guide explains how law firms evaluate candidates.

- Most of the applicants will fall to the bottom of the bucket because they have too much “negative weight.”
- The law firm will ultimately choose the candidate who has the least amount of “negative weight” and the most positive “points” (buoyancy factors that help a candidate rise to the top of the bucket).

Law firms are businesses and governed by maximizing self-interest, which means they will hire the attorney who floats to the top of its bucket of applicants. You will succeed in lateraling into a law firm to the extent that you have the least amount of “negative weight” and are at the top of the bucket.

## **The Applicant Bucket**

The concept of the “applicant bucket” will govern how long it will take for you to get a position with a major law firm.

- If you look at each application you file, there will be a certain number of applicants for that position that the law firm will be evaluating in a “bucket.”

## **The Reality of Employability**

*Attorneys get a false sense of their employability from getting summer associate positions*

At the outset, it is important to understand that applying for a lateral law firm position is very different than applying for a summer associate position—and you should avoid

falling into the trap of getting a false sense of security about your chances at lateral positions based on your success in getting hired in the past as a summer associate. It is far different (and often far more difficult) to get a lateral position than it is to get a summer associate position. When you are looking for a position as a law student, you are competing with roughly 30,000 other second-year law students for one of 4,000 or 5,000 summer associate jobs in good-sized law firms. Then, the only thing the law firm has to evaluate you on are factors such as (1) the quality of your law school, (2) your law school grades, and (3) your personality. You do not yet have a practice area or the kind of “negative weight” that attorneys accumulate throughout their careers.

***“There are fewer jobs for lateral attorneys and far more reasons to disqualify you from each job. As a summer associate, there are hundreds of jobs in each city for you. As a lateral attorney, you may be competing for only one job, or a few.”***

Most law firms with summer positions are going to prefer people coming from the top 10 to 15 law schools. The next group of people the law firms will hire for summer associate programs are the people with the best grades from local law schools.

If you are in a top-10 law school, it is not going to be difficult for you to secure a summer associate position because there are only a few thousand students competing for these positions from these schools each year—far less than the 4,000 to 5,000 positions these firms have. *At this point in your career, there are more jobs for attorneys with good*

*backgrounds than there are applicants from the best schools.*

If you went to one of the top law schools like **Harvard** or **Stanford**, you are going to have a sense that you are “extremely marketable” because there will have been so much interest in you earlier in your career (at the summer associate stage). But you may not, in fact, be so marketable as a lateral attorney. Any attorney from a top law school, or with stellar grades from a lesser law school, is automatically at the “top of the bucket” and it is relatively

easy to get a summer associate position in a major law firm. There are fewer “qualified applicants” from top schools, or at the tops of their classes from lesser schools, than there are positions.

But when you get out into the real world and start applying for lateral positions, law firms start having multiple reasons to disqualify you and it becomes much more difficult to rise to the top of the bucket. Whereas before all you needed to do was show up as a student from a top law school and smile to get a position, you now need to go through a rigid process of elimination against other highly qualified candidates.

## Getting Hired Laterally

*To get hired as a lateral attorney, you must rise to the top of the*



You are more likely to rise to the top of the bucket if...

### You Are Well-Positioned



- ...you have 1 to 5 years of experience.
- ...you are in a busy practice area.
- ...you are looking for a position in a good economy.
- ...you are admitted to the bar where you are looking.

### You Are Employed

- ...you are coming from a law firm.
- ...you are working as a full-time attorney.
- ...you are coming from another large law firm.
- ...you are employed when looking for a position.



### You Are Successful



- ...you were a summer associate in a major law firm.
- ...you have significant business.
- ...you attended a top law school.
- ...you did well in law school.

### You Are Focused

- ...you are seeking a full-time position.
- ...you are in a niche practice area.
- ...you are a narrow specialist.



*Partner One  
&  
Partner Two*

— ATTORNEYS AT LAW —

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## The 30 Ways to Tell How Employable You Are Infographic

### You Have Advocates



- ...your recruiter understands your background and is approaching firms without formal openings.
- ...you have a preexisting relationship with a partner in the firm.
- ...you are using a good recruiter.
- ...you are moving to a region where you have family or connections.

### You Search Strategically



- ...you are looking for a position in a small city.
- ...you are looking for a position with a smaller, lower-paying law firm.
- ...you are one of the first applicants.
- ...you are looking at several markets.

### Your Attitude is Good



- ...you do not have a sense of entitlement.
- ...you are positive about your previous (or current) employer.
- ...you are not outspoken about yourself (or any social issues).
- ...you do not move firms often.

### You Look Professional



- ...you are attractive, well-spoken, well-groomed, well-dressed and confident.
- ...you are diverse (for certain firms).
- ...you look like someone who clearly wants to make his or her career in a law firm.

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## *bucket and not fall to the bottom of the bucket*

Here is a partial list of reasons that will disqualify you from getting a position as a lateral attorney—or, conversely, may help you get a position. These are “negative weight” and “buoyancy factors” that can either help you fall to the bottom or rise to the top of the bucket. This list of 30 reasons is so extensive that the challenge of getting a position as a lateral attorney should be self-explanatory.

Hypothetically, imagine every applicant starts with 100 points. Some of these factors will give you points, but most will cause you to lose points. In my experience, the average person hired laterally by a large prestigious law firm needs at least 50 points to get hired.

### **YOU ARE MORE LIKELY TO RISE TO THE TOP OF THE BUCKET IF...**

1

***...You have 1 to 5 years of experience rather than more than 5 years of experience (and no business).***

Most of the positions for laterals inside of large law firms are for attorneys with 1 to 5 years of experience. Law firms want attorneys

who are young, who do not need to be compensated like partners, and who will work hard for the prospect of advancement. Moreover, younger attorneys have lower billing rates than senior attorneys and clients want partners doing the work when they are paying high billing rates. Partners also want to do high billable hour rate work themselves because they typically make more money when they do the work themselves than when they give the work to others.

I would estimate 95% of the positions out there are for junior attorneys with 1 to

5 years of experience. Youth is a benefit when it comes to getting hired by large law firms. When you get older, you are expected to either be a partner with business or well on your way to being a partner at a major law firm. Except for some specialist attorney positions, very few law firms have much of a need for attorneys with 10+ years of experience and no business.

Notwithstanding, I do place multiple attorneys each month with 5 to 30+ years of experience and no business, and there are lots of law firms that have work for attorneys in this category. But the reality is that there are far fewer law firms that have work for senior attorneys with no business than there are law firms that have work for attorneys with business and junior attorneys.

Notwithstanding, I do place multiple attorneys each month with 5 to 30+ years of experience with no business and there are lots of law firms that have work for attorneys in this category. But the reality is that there are far fewer law firms that have work for senior attorneys with no business than there are law firms that have work for attorneys with business and junior attorneys.

## The Bucket Lesson

There are very few attorneys with 1 to 5 years of experience practicing law compared to attorneys with 5 to 30+ years of experience. Unless an attorney has significant business, the attorney will fall to the “bottom of the bucket” once the attorney accumulates more than 5 years of experience.

2

### *...You are looking for a position in a small city as opposed to a large city.*

Large cities have thousands of attorneys and applicants for each position. The more the applicants, the more difficult it is to get the job. Law firms can afford to be ridiculously choosy when hiring attorneys in large cities.

There are a ton of positions in New York City, for example, but law firms in New York City have a virtually limitless number of attorneys to choose from. The same is true of markets like Washington, DC and Los Angeles. If a

market has a lot of applicants, you will be competing with a lot of people for each position. To have the best chance of being hired, you better be the strongest applicant that a law firm sees. Are you?

If you want to lateral into a major law firm in a market like New York City, it is not enough to have a few years of litigation experience and have gone to a law school like **Harvard**. You also need to be coming from a major law firm. The situation is different if you are looking in a smaller market.

Smaller markets make it easier to rise to the top of the bucket. It is common for attorneys to start out their careers in major, competitive markets and then move to smaller ones later in their careers. If you have strong qualifications, it is always easier to get a position in a smaller market than it is in a larger market.

On the flip side, smaller markets have fewer opportunities. In some niche practice areas, an opportunity may only come up once every few years. Larger markets are more competitive, but they also have more opportunities. If you are working with an aggressive, knowledgeable recruiter with access to jobs, you are going to have continual access to new opportunities in large markets.

*Continued on the next page*



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## The Bucket Lesson

In large cities, law firms receive more applicants for each position and this makes it more difficult for attorneys to get hired. Despite this competitiveness, there are more jobs and opportunities in large cities. It is easier to get positions in smaller markets, but there tend to be fewer positions.

Law firms are businesses. If they have the work and can plug you in and bill you out for far more money than they are paying you, then they make money. Law firms want to make money and will hire you if they can make money. The upside of finding law firms with unadvertised positions is that you are the only attorney in the bucket competing for the job. I make most of my placements finding law firms with unadvertised needs for my candidates, and it is a skill that comes from lots of experience and market knowledge. To stand out, you want to be the only applicant for a job whenever possible.

3

***...Your recruiter understands your background and is approaching firms without formal openings instead of just approaching firms with openings.***

Most lateral candidates make the mistake of only applying to firms with openings. But this means they throw themselves into a bucket with tons of other, highly qualified applicants and severely diminish their odds of getting a position. It is simple mathematics.

A good legal recruiter can increase your odds of getting a position because a good legal recruiter has the market knowledge to locate law firms (in every city) that have an “untapped need” for someone with your qualifications. They know when a firm is growing in your practice area, and they know what firms will always have an interest in candidates with your background. Being a good legal recruiter is an age-old matchmaking skill.

## The Bucket Lesson

Recruiters are matchmakers. A good recruiter will help you locate firms that may not necessarily have openings but are likely to be a good “match” for the two of you. If there are not a lot of applicants for the same position, this will increase your odds of getting a job.

4

***...You have a preexisting relationship with a partner with business in the firm rather than if you do not have such a relationship.***

For a variety of reasons, it is not a good idea to try and use your “friends” and other contacts inside of law firms to get a position. When you use a friend to try and get a position (1) you do not know how the law



firm views your contact (the firm might be getting ready to fire your contact), (2) your contact is likely to say positive and negative things about you, and (3) friends are often competitive with one another, and may not even pass along your resume.

The exception to this, however, is a powerful partner inside of the law firm who has business. Law firms want to please attorneys with business and will hire someone recommended by powerful partners with business. Partners with business can give you a serious leg up in your search, so if you know a partner with business you should draw upon that partner in your job search.

## The Bucket Lesson

Partners with business can get you a position inside of a major law firm. You will rise to the top of the bucket if you know a partner with business who can help you in your search.

5

***...You are looking for a position with a smaller, lower-paying law firm rather than a major, brand-name law firm.***

Without taking sides on the matter, most attorneys tend to prefer major law firms over smaller ones. When they are looking for positions, many attorneys will confine their searches to major law firms and not look

at smaller law firms. But smaller law firms receive fewer applicants than larger law firms and therefore it is much easier to get positions with smaller law firms than larger law firms.

## The Bucket Lesson

It is easier to get a position with a smaller law firm than a major law firm because there are fewer applicants for each position.

6

***...You are in a busy practice area compared to a slow practice area.***

Practice areas go through cycles. At various points in time, certain practice areas are very busy and others are very slow. For example:

- Real estate tends to be very active when interest rates are low and very slow when interest rates are high.
- Corporate is very active when the economy is very active and very slow when it is not.
- Litigation tends to be active when the economy is slow and not as active when it is active.
- Bankruptcy tends to get very active when major industries are experiencing serious issues.

When corporate is very slow, the market tends to have hundreds of applicants for each position because attorneys are losing their

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jobs and there is not enough work to go around. But when corporate and real estate are busy, the hiring criteria of even major American law firms will go down dramatically and it is not uncommon for people coming out of small law firms, and from mediocre law schools, to get numerous offers with major law firms. When the market is very busy, there are not enough applicants for many of the positions inside major law firms and their hiring standards go down. There are not enough qualified attorneys to go around.

The success of any search you do will always be dependent on how busy your practice area is.

## The Bucket Lesson

Depending on the economy, the practice area you are in will either help you rise to the top of the bucket or it will not.

7

***...You are looking for a position in a good economy rather than in a poor economy.***

The economy has a serious impact on what happens with your search. If you are searching for a position in a good economy, you will often rise to the top of the bucket because there are more positions available and hiring standards go down. If you are searching in a bad economy, it may be

extremely difficult to find a position compared to a good economy. There are also likely to be far more applicants for each position in a poor economy than there are in a good economy.

## The Bucket Lesson

The economy has a major impact on whether you will rise to the top of the bucket in your search or not.

8

***...You are coming from a law firm as opposed to another practice setting.***

A law firm is a unique practice setting. A law firm is in the business of selling its services to the public. Attorneys coming from in-house positions, the government, academia and so forth are not in the business of selling their services to the public, and law firms do not think of them the same way.

Attorneys working inside of law firms are almost always more likely to rise to the top of the bucket than those applying from other practice settings. Working in another practice setting (other than at the beginning of your career, in connection with a federal clerkship) is going to hold you back. Law firms want people who can step into them and assume the same demands as they were under in their previous positions. The quality of in-house and other positions varies too widely across the board for most law firms to trust hiring from them.

## The Bucket Lesson

You will rise to the top of the bucket if you are coming from a law firm and not another practice setting.

9

*...You are one of the first applicants compared to one of the later ones.*

At BCG Attorney Search, we aggressively reach out to our candidates the second we get a new position and do everything we can to make sure that they are among the first applicants (or even the first applicant, as is often the case) the law firm sees. When a law firm has an opening and starts interviewing people, the firm is far more likely to speak with the first people who apply compared to those who apply much later. The reason for this is that when they have a need, law

***“At BCG Attorney Search, we aggressively reach out to our candidates the second we get a new position and do everything we can to make sure that they are among the first applicants the law firm sees.”***

firms are typically losing money by not having someone do the work and eagerly bring in applicants as soon as they can so they can move on and fill the position.

Additionally, law firms often feel a sense of “investment” in the first person they interview and will be more inclined to hire this person than others who come along later. The initial bonding that occurs with early applicants and interviewees often makes the law firms feel that there might be a sense of “disloyalty” if they interview people who come along later. When a law firm bonds with an early applicant, even outstanding, “blow your socks off” applicants who come later are often at a huge disadvantage. The disadvantage that later applicants have is so severe that law firms often do not even review them and simply file them away while their interviews are underway.

## The Bucket Lesson

Early applicants are far likely to rise to the top of the bucket than later ones.

10

*...You do not have a sense of entitlement rather than if you have a sense of entitlement.*

Many attorneys looking for positions have a sense of entitlement and think that employers should consider their needs and wants in the hiring process. You are entitled to have wants and needs in your search. However, the more wants and needs that you have, the more reasons you give for the law firm to hire someone else (who does not have so many wants and needs). You need to position yourself as the best applicant for the law firm’s position.

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The more entitlements and requirements you have the less likely you are to get hired.

When you go into any search, you are going to have a strong advantage if you do not have any special requirements. The law firm wants to think of you as a “loyal soldier” and someone who can carry out its instructions without letting ego interfere.

## The Bucket Lesson

Attorneys without entitlement issues are far more likely to do better in their searches than attorneys with entitlement issues.

11

***...You are using a good recruiter as opposed to a poor or average recruiter.***

A good recruiter will not only expose you to the correct law firms and openings, but a good recruiter also will help position you for each job in a way that minimizes the things that would drop you to the bottom of bucket. Some recruiters may “get lucky” and make a placement or two a year, and others can make 30+ placements a year—and some even more. The ability of recruiters to make so many placements comes down to how well they do their jobs and understand the business of legal recruiting. There are huge differences in the skill sets of legal recruiters. These differences can make a profound

difference in what happens in your career. You should always strive to use the very best legal recruiter you can.

## The Bucket Lesson

You need to use the best legal recruiter that you can. By using the best legal recruiter in the market, you are far more likely to rise to the top of the bucket.

12

***...You were a summer associate in a major law firm rather than if you were not.***

If an attorney has been a summer associate at a major American law firm, this shows law firms that the attorney:

- wanted to work in a law firm as a summer associate (and was committed to being in a law firm early on in his or her career), and
- was a good enough law student to get a position in a major American law firm as a summer associate.

The quality of the firm you were a summer associate in will also, then, reflect the sort of grades that you received in your first, all-important year of law school.

If an attorney does not have this on his or her resume, it is often a deal breaker for the largest law firms. The largest law firms

will almost always prefer hiring people who were summer associates in major law firms. The perception if you were not a summer associate at a major American law firm is that you were not marketable enough as a law student and, therefore, that there must be something wrong with you. Law firms want to hire people with a historical track record of achievement who have spent the majority of their careers in law firm environments. Law firms will “discriminate” against attorneys for years later in their careers (even ten years out) when they see they were never summer associates in a major law firm.

## The Bucket Lesson

You will have a more difficult time rising to the top of the bucket if you were not a summer associate in a major law firm.

13

*...You are seeking a full-time position rather than if you are seeking a part-time or flex-time position.*

It is very common for women who have children and want to switch firms to tell firms that they would like to work three or four days a week, or one day a week at home. Law firms are likely to agree to this if the woman is already working there, but it is an entirely different matter if the attorney is approaching law firms seeking to do this as a lateral. The idea that they might not be able to rely on you for an important project or that you might have to leave during the middle

of the day simply does not go over well when you are lateralling.

That is not to say that you cannot lateral into a part-time or flex-time position—I place women who are seeking to do this just about every month and consider myself extremely successful doing so! The issue is that you will simply have fewer opportunities than you might otherwise have.

***“If an attorney does not have [summer associate at (Major law firm)] on his or her resume, it is often a deal breaker for the largest law firms.”***

In addition to having fewer opportunities, you will need to have skills that are so good that you will rise to the top of the bucket “despite the fact” that you are interested in working a reduced schedule. The better option (hint, hint)

is not to mention this at the interview stage and start the job as a full-time attorney and then bring it up after you have been hired if it becomes an issue. Some firms might not have an issue with you working at home on Friday at all, for example, and it might be common for many attorneys in the firm. Do not create issues that will make it difficult for you to get hired and look worse than other applicants.

## The Bucket Lesson

You are more likely to rise to the top of the bucket if you apply to law firms without asking for a flexible position.

### *...You are in a niche practice area rather than a major one.*

There are so many litigators out there that they are practically crawling out of the walls. If a law firm needs a litigator, it is never very difficult for them to find one because there are so many. In contrast, there are very few attorneys with a niche practice area such as employee benefits. The more niche your practice area is, the fewer applications each law firm will receive and the more likely you are to rise to the top of the bucket.

Attorneys with very specialized skills in a given practice area often do not need the best educational qualifications or to come from the best schools to be hired. They also do not need to be 1 to 5 years out of school, have business, come from the best law firms, be employed, or come from a law firm at all. There are just not a lot of these attorneys in the market, so they are far more likely to rise to the top of the bucket when a firm has a need. (Of course, the flip side is that there are not as many job openings in niche practice areas).

## The Bucket Lesson

Attorneys in niche practice areas are far more likely to rise to the top of the bucket than attorneys who are not in niche practice areas.

### *...You are working as a full-time attorney rather than as a contract attorney.*

It is difficult getting a position in a major law firm if you are a contract attorney. The problem with being a contract attorney is that it suggests to law firms that:

- you cannot find a position in a major law firm,
- are interested in something that is not permanent,
- are doing work that is likely not as sophisticated as full-time attorneys are doing; and
- are willing to work cheaply for a law firm (at least more cheaply than full-time attorneys).

All of this, of course, is stuff that can prevent you from being at the top of the bucket. There

are always counterarguments to make, but the general rule is that working as a contract attorney sends the message to major law firms that you do not belong at the top of the bucket.

## The Bucket Lesson

An attorney who is a contract attorney will be penalized and fall to the bottom of the bucket when searching for a position in a major law firm.

16

***...You are coming from another large law firm rather than coming from a small law firm.***

Large law firms almost always want to hire people coming from other major law firms. The reason for this is that the quality of work, training, and expectations for partners and associates tend to be similar at the largest law firms.

The assumption of large law firms is that attorneys coming from other large firms are likely to have done a lot of work for major clients and know how to think through complex problems in the manner expected by high paying major clients. Large law firms are of the view that smaller clients do not want, nor will they pay for, attorneys to do very, very thorough work, and that smaller law firms (in general) tend to do work for smaller clients.

## The Bucket Lesson

An attorney coming from a large, prestigious law firm is much more likely to be hired than an attorney coming from a smaller law firm.

17

***...You are positive about your previous (or current) employer rather than if you are negative.***

Attorneys go into law firms and interviews all the time after having had problems with their previous (or current) employers and then talk about this when they go into interviews. While there is nothing wrong with having issues with your previous employer, when you bring this up it signals to the prospective law firm that the odds are pretty good you will do this with them one day as well. Law firms are not stupid. If you have had problems with a previous employer, do not mention it. If you want to get hired you should come across as someone who gets along wherever he or she goes.

## The Bucket Lesson

You will fall to the bottom of the bucket if you say negative things about your previous employer.

18

***...You are not outspoken about yourself (or any social issues) rather than if you are.***

Attorneys are often interested in and outspoken about various issues. The issues that attorneys are outspoken about could be related to race, sexuality, religion, or other social issues that affect either the attorney or others. While law firms love diversity, they also are very conservative institutions and are afraid of people who are outspoken because they fear such outspoken people could draw negative attention to them. In general, all things



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considered, law firms will avoid people with strong opinions about social issues and instead select attorneys who appear to be the types who will sit at their desks and work without an interest in social issues.

Lawyers play an extremely important role in society regarding advancing various social issues, of course, but law firms never want that attention turned towards the law firm.

***“Lawyers play an extremely important role in society regarding advancing various social issues, of course, but law firms never want that attention turned towards the law firm.”***

## The Bucket Lesson

You are much better off appearing neutral and uninterested in social issues than appearing engaged in these sorts of issues.

19

***...You do not move firms often.***

Law firms welcome lateral attorneys and their practices thrive on hiring them, but if you are in the habit of moving every year or so it will send the message to prospective law firms that you are likely going to leave them too. Attorneys leave

firms for a variety of reasons, and most of these reasons are good ones. But if you change jobs frequently it will indicate to future law firms that you might have some of the following issues:

- You might not be able to get along with people you work with and for.
- You might not like practicing law, but are trying to find if there is an environment where it could work for you.
- You might not do good work and are getting poor reviews.
- You might be someone “fickle” and simply enjoy jumping around from firm to firm.

The takeaway is that any law firm that sees you moving a lot is right to assume you will leave them as well.

## The Bucket Lesson

You will fall to the bottom of the bucket if it looks to firms like you move too often. In general, you should never move more than two times in five years.

20

***...You are employed versus unemployed when looking for a position.***

If you are unemployed, it is always going to be far more difficult to get a position than if you

are employed. If an attorney is unemployed, the message this sends to potential employers is that the attorney either (1) was fired or asked to leave, or (2) does not care enough about working that he or she has no issues being unemployed. Law firms expect attorneys always to be employed when looking for a position.

An additional fact is that you are always better off looking for a position when you are coming from a position of not needing a job versus needing a job. People who need jobs have a much more difficult time and therefore appear less desirable. All things considered, you look much more desirable to law firms when you do not need a job than when you need a job.

- In a market like Los Angeles, it is \$1,000,000.
- In the Bay Area, it is going to be at least \$2,000,000.

It depends on the size of the market the attorney is practicing in. If you have a good amount of business, you are always going to rise to the top of the bucket and be seriously considered by law firms. Law firms function and are supported by attorneys with business, and they value them a great deal. If you have a significant amount of business, this will help you get looked at by serious firms in your market.

Business is so important, in fact, that law firms will usually ignore other negative factors in your background if you have enough of it.

## The Bucket Lesson

You are going to be far better off looking for a position when you are employed than when you are not employed.

## The Bucket Lesson

If you have a significant amount of business, you will rise to the top of the bucket in almost every major market.

21

### *...You have significant business.*

If an attorney has a significant amount of business, the attorney will always get a serious look by major law firms. How much is a lot of business?

- In a major market like New York, it is going to be \$2,000,000 or \$3,000,000.
- In a smaller market like Detroit, it is going to be \$500,000.

22

### *...You attended a top law school compared to a lesser-ranked one.*

The law school you went to is very important for getting your first position as a summer associate and your first permanent position, but it becomes less important over time. Nevertheless, the quality of the law school you attended is something that will either

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hurt or help you even ten years out of law school. I have seen numerous law firms reject otherwise highly qualified candidates coming from major law firms because they did not like the law school the attorney attended.

Major law firms have to show their clients that they have the “cream of the crop” working on their matters. If an attorney did not attend a top law school, this does not look good to clients. Moreover, because most large law firms are composed of attorneys who attended top law schools, they tend to want to hire more of their own.

## The Bucket Lesson

Law firms prefer to hire attorneys from top law schools. You will rise to the top of the bucket if you attended a top law school.

23

*...You did well in law school rather than if you did not do well in law school.*

If you did extraordinarily well in law school, even years later, this makes you look more marketable and desirable to major law firms. Law school performance is an indicator of aptitude for the practice of law and is important to law firms. Some law firms, such as **Gibson Dunn**, even have grade cutoffs for partners with huge books of business.

Law firms take grades quite seriously because they want to hire people who reflect well on them. I have seen otherwise very successful partners and associates rejected by law firms for not having the sorts of grades the law firms expected. I recently saw a partner from a major American law firm go all the way through the interview process with **Skadden** and get very close to an offer before her grades were even considered. When they saw her grades, the entire process stopped because the firm did not think her grades were good enough.

## The Bucket Lesson

Law firms take your law school grades seriously throughout your entire career. You are more likely to stay toward the top of the bucket if your grades are good than if they are average, or poor.

24

*...You are looking at several markets rather than if you are looking at one or just a few markets.*

Attorneys who are looking at multiple markets put themselves at a great advantage. The reason that looking at multiple markets is such a good idea is that you are increasing your odds of getting a position with a law firm exponentially. If you look at ten markets instead of just one market, you could increase your odds of getting a position by 10 or more times. Not looking at multiple markets—

especially when you are in a niche practice area—is not smart. Attorneys who look at multiple markets almost always drastically increase the success of their searches.

On a daily basis, I have attorneys interviewing all over the United States and getting interest from major law firms who might not otherwise get this interest if they were looking only at one market. Looking at multiple markets where there may be more demand than in your current market is one of the smartest things an attorney can do when looking for a new position. You cannot control inefficiencies in each market and are always far better off if you look at multiple markets.

## The Bucket Lesson

You are more likely to rise to the top of the bucket if you are looking at more than one market in your search. By looking at multiple markets, you are far more likely to rise to the top of the bucket than if you are just looking at one market.

25

***...You are admitted to the bar where you are looking rather than if you are not admitted to the bar.***

There are certain jurisdictions where it is much easier to get a position if you “have the bar” than if you do not (meaning you have already taken and passed the bar exam in that state).

Having the bar shows employers in these areas that you are serious about working there and have taken the time to take and pass the bar. There are also areas where it can be difficult to pass the bar and, accordingly, law firms are more likely to hire you if you have the bar than if you do not. California and New York are two jurisdictions where the bar is very important to employers. These jurisdictions also tend to have lower pass rates.

## The Bucket Lesson

You are more likely to rise to the top of the bucket if you have the bar exam in certain regions than if you do not.

26

***...You are moving to a region where you have family or connections rather than if you are moving to a region where you do not.***

When you are from an area and have ties there, law firms are more likely to believe that you will stay in the area if they hire you. In contrast, if you are relocating to an area where you have relatively few ties, the law firms will be under the impression that the odds of you leaving will increase. Law firms want to hire people they believe are likely to be stable and settle down. If you have family in an area, it will appear to the firm that you are likely to remain there.

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## The Bucket Lesson

You will rise to the top of the bucket if you have significant ties to an area that make it look like you will stay there.

27

*...You are a narrow specialist rather than if you have experience in multiple areas.*

Large law firms do not hire generalists. They hire specialists. Large law firms work for major companies that pay high hourly rates for their work. Clients pay high hourly rates for people with specialized skills that can zero in on a matter and solve it quickly without spending a lot of time getting up to speed. While many attorneys believe that their breadth of experience doing different things is good, law firms are interested in specialists. You may think that it is a good thing that you have experience doing both real estate and corporate, but a large law firm will expect you to be devoted to doing only one of these practice areas. In addition, a law firm will likely want you to be even more specialized within that single practice area (for example, they may want a corporate attorney with exclusive experience doing municipal bonds).

***“I make these observations based on experience, and time and time again I have seen law firms hire under qualified people who were extremely attractive.”***

## The Bucket Lesson

You will rise to the top of the bucket the more specialized you are.

28

*...You are attractive, well-spoken, well-groomed, well-dressed and confident rather than if you are not.*

It is not politically correct to say so, but I am going to point out some facts that are simply true:

- Tall, attractive, and athletic men are more likely to be hired.
- Attractive women are more likely to be hired.
- Well-dressed, confident people are more likely to be hired.
- Fit people are more likely to be hired than people who look unhealthy and out of shape.

These are facts. Appearance makes a huge difference and over and over again I have seen attorneys with these above qualities

have a major advantage in their searches for new positions. Law firms believe that how you look, speak, dress, and carry yourself is a reflection on them.

I make these observations based on experience, and time and time again I have seen law firms hire under qualified people

who were extremely attractive. It often makes no sense to me, because one would think that looks would not be important in assessing the quality of an attorney—but it is important to firms. In contrast, I have seen attorneys with stellar qualifications who did not keep themselves up have a lot of difficulty in the job search process.

## The Bucket Lesson

How you look and appear will help you either rise to the top of the bucket or fall to the bottom of the bucket.

29

***...You are diverse (for certain firms) rather than if you are not.***

Certain law firms greatly value diversity. If you are an African American, or diverse, there are law firms that view your diversity as a real plus. Law firms are historically not very diverse places, and many of them are going out of their way to bring more diversity to their firms. Most major law firms highly value diversity, but there are some law firms that have not kept up with the pace of change and where diversity may not help you. In general, however, diversity is a good thing. If you are diverse this will help you rise to the top of the bucket.

## The Bucket Lesson

Being diverse is something that will help you rise to the top of the bucket.

30

***...You look like someone who clearly wants to make his or her career in a law firm compared to someone who might leave and go in-house or stop practicing law after a few years.***

Many attorneys in the market do not commit to working in law firms and having long-term careers there. In fact, this is extremely common, and law firms can pick up on this in the interview stage and do not like it. They want to hire people who are ambitious and want to stake their futures to working in a law firm. Attorneys who are committed to long-term success inside of a law firm are far more likely to be hired than attorneys who appear like they are “coasting” and will exit a law firm within a few years. A law firm can tell you want a career inside of a law firm by some of the following signals:

- You are the primary breadwinner in your family.
- You came out of a lower to middle-class background and aspire to be a partner in a law firm.
- You do a lot of speaking, writing, and other activities related to your practice area.
- You tell the law firm that this is what you

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want to do as a career and will do what it takes.

- You have a personality that suggests you are interested in committing to the law firm for the long term.
- You are starting to bring in clients.
- You talk with a lot of enthusiasm about your practice area.

These are some of the factors that law firms pick up on and that make a serious difference regarding whether or not the law firm is interested in you. In contrast, the attorney that is likely to leave the practice of law will come across as the opposite of many of these characteristics. An attorney truly interested in remaining in a law firm for his or her career will speak, act, and look far different than the attorney who is simply doing something for the short term.

## The Bucket Lesson

You are more likely to rise to the top of the bucket if you look like someone committed to working in a law firm over the long term compared to someone who is not.

## CONCLUSIONS

These 30 factors will determine whether or not you get hired by a major American law firm, as well as the speed with which you get interviews and are hired. Law firms evaluate your candidacy and whether you rise to the top of the bucket by carefully considering you in light of these 30 factors. Your success (or lack thereof) comes down to how you comport with these 30 factors.



Please see the following articles for more information:

*21 Reasons You Will Never Get a Job with a Major Law Firm Now (or Ever Again)*

*A Realistic Approach to Changing Practice Areas*

*Top 20 Mistakes Attorneys Make When Choosing to Look for and Accept New Jobs*

*State of the American Legal Job Market 2016: Hot and Weak Practice Areas of 2016*

*How the “Invisible Hand” Operates in Law Firm Employment Decisions: The Top 12 Most Important Factors Firms Consider When Hiring (and Firing) Attorneys*

*Why Going In-house Is Often the Worst Decision a Good Attorney Can Ever Make*

*The ‘Dark Side’ of Going In-house*

*Why Attorneys with 5+ Years of Law Firm Experience Are in Serious Trouble (and Seven Steps They Need to Take to Save Their Legal Careers)*

*When Is the Best Time of Year for Attorneys to Look for New Positions?*

*Narcissistic Entitlement Syndrome*

*How to Relocate to Another Area of the Country as an Attorney*

*How to Select the Best Legal Recruiter and Maximize the Effectiveness of Working with One*

*Relocating to Another Part of the Country as an Attorney*

*What Makes a World Class Recruiter*

*How to Rapidly Get Law Firm Offers (Even When Firms Have No Openings)*

*Choosing the Best Legal Recruiter*

*What Your Summers Say about You*

*Getting Referrals from Powerful People (We All Know Someone)*

*How Legitimate Are Law Firm Flex-Time Arrangements?*

*You Need Connections to Make the Most of Your Career*

*Develop a Niche*

*How Small Firms Can Steal Away Star Prospects from Large Firms*

*The Right Time to Specialize*

*Should I Accept a Contract Attorney Position?*

*Choosing the Small versus the Large Firm*

*To Temp or Not to Temp*

*What Factors Should I Consider When Thinking of Moving from a Big Downtown Firm to a Smaller One?*

*Does (Firm) Size Really Matter?*

*BCG Attorney Search’s Quick Reference Guide to Legal Practice Areas*

*The Top Five Ways to Be Positive (When Everyone and Everything around You Is Bringing You Down)*

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*Concentrate on the Positive, Not the Negative*

*Law Firm Diversity: They All Talk the Talk,  
But It's Harder to Walk the Walk*

*In Defense of Long-Term Employment with  
a Single Employer*

*The Top 5 Long-Term Benefits of Remaining  
Employed with a Single Law Firm*

*As an Unemployed Associate, How Can I  
Best Position Myself to Get Placed with a Top  
Law Firm?*

*Does Being Long-term Unemployed Hurt  
Chances of Getting Back in the Legal Field?*

*Top 9 Ways for Any Attorney to Generate  
a Ton of Business*

*Treating Your Legal Career Like a Small  
Business*

*The 2016 BCG Attorney Search Guide  
to America's Top 50 Law Schools*

*10 Factors That Matter to Big Firms More  
Than Where You Went to Law School: Why the  
Law School You Went to Ultimately Does Not  
Matter as Much as You Think It Does to Major  
Law Firms*

*Law School Grades and Your Career*

*Grades vs. Experience*

*How Can I Find a Job When I Didn't Graduate  
at the Top of My Class?*

*Do Grades and School Rankings Matter If  
Aiming for a Big-Law Job?*

*Why Every Attorney Should Look at Multiple  
Legal Markets When Doing a Job Search*

*A Comprehensive Guide to Bar Reciprocity:  
What States Have Reciprocity for Lawyers and  
Allow You to Waive into the Bar*

*"Waive" Goodbye to Taking Another Bar Exam:  
Typical Requirements and Tips to Effectively  
Manage the Waive-In Process*

*Resumes and Bar Admissions*

*Is It Important to Have Ties to the Region?*

*Why Do Law Firms Care If I Have "Ties" to a  
Market?*

*Geography and the Job Search*

*Associate with Experience in Different Areas  
Wonders How to Market Himself*

*Why You Should Dress Nicely as an Attorney  
Even When the Law Firm Is Casual*

*Interviewing and Dating: Some Parallel  
Principles*

*Interviewing Tips: The Five Musts of  
Interviewing*

*The #1 Attorney Career Killer That Attorneys  
Are Never Taught*

*The Only Thing That Matters Is Commitment*

*How to Easily Determine the Best Attorneys  
and Law Firms: The Five Prestige Levels of  
Attorneys and Law Firms*