

# Apprentice and Builder: The Two Stages of a Law Firm Attorney's Legal Career

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

**Summary:** Do you have the long-term vision and staying power to be truly successful at a large law firm? Learn about the two stages of a law firm attorney's legal career.

**The lifespan of an attorney's career is dominated by two stages - apprentice and builder.**

**The apprentice learns, observes, accrues goodwill, and learns the finite details that make for a strong attorney.**

**The builder stage of an attorney's career is when an attorney is building a business, especially as they bring in more business to the law firm.**

In law firms, there are two stages of an attorney's career.

**The first stage is the apprentice stage.** An apprentice is exactly what it sounds like: Someone who is there to watch people with more experience, learn a craft, [build up goodwill](#), and [learn the intricacies of how to be a good attorney](#). Most people fail as apprentices in the law firm system because, among other things, they are impatient, want too much too soon, and are controlled by their egos. [An attorney needs to be an apprentice for at least five years in the legal profession before the attorney can consider transitioning into being a builder--and at that point, the attorney must give everything he or she has and go all in.](#) [See Why Attorneys with 5+ Years of Law Firm Experience Are in Serious Trouble \(and Seven Steps They Need to Take to Save Their Legal Careers\)](#) for more information.

**The second stage is the building stage.** The builder is someone who has crossed the chasm from being an apprentice to someone who is now building a business. Builders are doing things that are likely to bring clients to them--and gradually they are succeeding at their rainmaking efforts. Instead of doing work assigned by others, they are getting their own work and also getting work to give to others. [They are contributing by training other attorneys, by doing their own work, and by bringing in work for others to do.](#) Most attorneys never make it to the building stage because they are either (1) not successful apprentices, or (2) do not lay sufficient groundwork in their careers to ever become builders. [An attorney should always try and transition into being a builder after practicing for five or six years with a law firm--and go all in.](#)

[Most attorneys in large law firms do not have the long-term vision or staying power they need to become truly successful apprentices or builders.](#) As a result, they get chewed up and spit out by their institutions without succeeding at either two stages. If you want to succeed in a law firm, nothing is more important than understanding where you fit and doing everything you can to succeed in each stage.

There are many roadblocks and pitfalls along the way towards becoming a successful builder-attorney, and many talented attorneys fall prey to these and fail. Most attorneys never complete the "apprentice stage" and very few attorneys ever make it to the "building stage." When law firms are hiring laterally, they are seeking both successful apprentices and successful builders. If you want to get hired by a top firm, you need to make sure that you fit into one or the other category at the right time. When it comes to getting law firm positions, many of the rejections come because the candidate simply did not look enough like one or the other.

Please see the following articles for more information:

[Why Law Firms Reject You](#)

[Why an Attorney Should Never Give Up After Being Rejected By a Few \(Or Many\) Law Firms Dealing with Rejection](#)

## The Successful Apprentice

The rewards for being a good apprentice are as follows:

### **You Will Learn How to Be as Good as Possible in Your Practice Area.**

Young attorneys often do not understand the overriding purpose of joining major law firms, working long hours, and trying to associate themselves with the most prestigious law firms they possibly can for as long as they possibly can. The reason is so the attorney can become the best apprentice possible. That is the entire point of being an apprentice--to learn a skill and to learn it in the best possible way that will ultimately bring the most rewards.

Getting a job with a major law firm that will give you exceptional training is more important to your legal career than the quality of the law school you went to. Going to a good law school is like being born being blonde, six-foot-three, smart, and gorgeous: It may help you, but only so much.

**Long hours and lots of work.** Long hours in major law firms are a privilege. You should be eager to get as many hours as possible, because the more hours you work, the more likely you are to become an expert in your practice area.

**Prestigious law firm.** The more prestigious the law firm, the better your training looks to the world and potential future employers and clients.

**Major law firm.** The larger the law firm, the more specialized your training is likely to be. The more specialized your training, the more likely it is that future law firms will feel you have a skill that is not normally found in the market and will want to hire you for that skill. Large law firms also have more sophisticated work. They tend to do work for larger clients and they tend to work on larger and more sophisticated matters.

An apprentice should try and work for the largest and most prestigious law firm possible. It will help your career a great deal if you begin by working in the same vicinity as well-regarded attorneys at a prestigious law firm that has a lot of important work.

**Please see the following articles for more information:**

[The 9 Most Important Characteristics of the Best Law Firm Training Programs](#)

[Top 10 Characteristics of Superstar Associates Who Make Partner](#)

[You Will Develop Allies Who Will Help You Later.](#)

If you work for important attorneys and do a good job for them, they will help you later in your career--after you leave as an apprentice. I know of countless attorneys who dedicated their hearts and souls to the people they worked for and, because of this and the goodwill they built up as apprentices, they were able to get great new positions when they left their firms. In fact, if you do a good job as an apprentice, the people you work for will often be available to help you for your entire career. It is not unusual for an attorney who worked for someone a few decades previously to reach out to that person for help as a reference in a job search years later. I have seen more instances than I can count in which I placed attorneys who got a "leg up" on their competition because they received excellent references from attorneys they worked for as apprentices.

Apprentices need to build allies beyond just the people they work for. It is also important for young attorneys in the apprentice stage to ensure they build alliances with those with whom they work--including fellow apprentices (both junior and senior) and staff members of the firm. The job of every apprentice should be to respect the people they are working for and build up as much goodwill as they possibly can. Apprentices should do whatever they can to create goodwill because they will need it in the future.

Fellow apprentices in large law firms will become general counsels in companies later on and be able to send work to the attorney.

Fellow apprentices will often become partners in other law firms and be in a position to hire the attorney later.

Fellow apprentices will be asked about their experience with the attorney at various points throughout the attorney's career.

Only the best apprentices eventually become builders.

### **You Will Get Paid Learning a Craft.**

In many professions, the apprentice does not get paid well for the work he or she does. If you went into the medical profession, for example, you would be expected to work even more brutal hours and get paid very little. In the legal profession, you can get paid a ton of money just to learn how to do sophisticated legal work. The amount of money that associates get paid keeps increasing. Being an apprentice in a major law firm can be a very good opportunity in all respects.

### **You Will Be Able to Watch Someone Who Is a Builder and Possibly Be Mentored by This Person.**

Arguably, the greatest benefit of being an apprentice is the ability to watch and learn from someone who is a builder. If the builder mentors you, as well, then that is all the better. If a builder mentors you, the builder may help you avoid bad situations and will steer you away from making career mistakes. You will also have the ability to learn how the builder generates business, keeps clients happy, and does the things they need to do to stay successful at their jobs--and you can also see the mistakes that they make.

Being a successful apprentice is a crucial step in the evolution of an attorney into a builder. Attorneys need to see the forest through the trees: You are working as an apprentice so that you can be a builder later on. You should carefully observe builders along the way.

**Please see the following articles for more information:**

[11 Steps for Attorneys to Find Mentors \(and Why Attorneys Need Mentors\)](#)

[Taking Charge of Your Mentoring Experience](#)

[The Importance of Law Firm Mentoring Programs](#)

[How Do I Learn the Ropes without a Good Mentor](#)

**The Longer You Work as an Apprentice, the More You Can Develop Your Style as a Builder.**

Working for a builder is similar to being a child growing up. At first, children watch their parents and their parents are the centers of their worlds. As they get older, young adults start finding fault with their parents and realize all the things that are wrong with their parents. At some point, people break out on their own and move away from their parents. Of course, if things go well, even adults always return to parents for advice, encouragement, and support.

To become successful builders, apprentices need to watch the people around them, observe these people, and then develop their own styles--hopefully improving on what they have observed from others. Very few apprentices understand that there are major advantages to following good attorneys.

### **The Failed Apprentice**

The reasons people fail as apprentices are as follows:

#### **They Never Become Apprentices to Begin with--or Do Not Stick with It.**

For an attorney to know what he or she is doing in the attorney's practice area, the attorney needs to spend a good five years working as an apprentice--and often longer. One of the dumbest things I see on an ongoing basis is attorneys who come out of school and (1) never work for a law firm, or (2) work for a law firm for only a few years and then do something else entirely. Often it is the attorneys with the best paper qualifications--those who appear "poised" to do very well as apprentices--who make these disastrous choices. These are often attorneys already at [top law firms](#), who went to the best law schools, and who got the best grades.

It is advisable that apprentices work for others for at least five years and preferably (1) in the best law firm possible and (2) with the best attorneys possible.

Why a law firm? Law firms are accountable to paying clients and are part of a competitive market economy. If law firms do not do good work, they will not get more work and will go out of business. While [in-house](#), government, public interest, and other attorneys in other practice settings may not want to hear it, the reality is that attorneys who work in law firms (for paying clients) are often more accountable and held to a higher standard than attorneys who work in most other practice settings.

You need to do the best work you possibly can in a law firm, and if you do not, you will lose your job quickly. Law firms are competitive places, and the best among them pay a lot of money. They have people lining up out the door and around the corner waiting to take your job. So if you are an apprentice at one of these firms, you need to shine if you want to keep your job.

Attorneys who never become apprentices, or do not stick with it, typically do not have very rewarding legal careers. [The best attorneys are the ones who were apprentices, succeeded as apprentices, and emerged as builders.](#)

**Want to go [in-house](#)?** Very few large companies will hire attorneys who have not demonstrated a history of success at a large law firm. I speak with attorneys all the time who dream of being general counsels and working in major corporations. Large companies almost always hire people to be general counsels who have been partners in major law firms. Why wouldn't they? The best companies want people who have succeeded in law firms and know how the game is played. They do not want attorneys who have given it a try for a few years and then dropped out.

**Want to be a judge?** Your odds of being a judge will be much better if you spend the time it takes to learn how to be a successful apprentice at a law firm and learn to master a practice area. You will have much more long-term credibility as a judge if you have been a successful apprentice first.

Regardless of what you want to do with your career, you will be better off if you first master being an apprentice.

**Please see the following articles for more information:**

[The "Systematic Reason" Why Most Attorneys Fail in Large, Prestigious Law Firms](#)

[The One Simple Rule for Succeeding in a Law Firm](#)

[The Real Reason Why Most Attorneys' Careers Are Out of Control](#)

[10 Biggest Career Mistakes Big Law Firm Attorneys Make \(and 10 Ways to Survive in a Big Law Firm\)](#)

[They Choose the Wrong Person to Apprentice for \(or Apprentice for a Firm as Opposed to a Particular Builder at a Firm\).](#)

Every attorney needs a mentor (preferably more than one) in the law firm he or she is working for. If you do not have this, you are operating at your peril. It is not enough to just work for the best law firm you can. You need to immediately find someone from whom you can get work. You need someone you can impress and someone who will go to bat for you and protect you. If you do not have this, you will often be in trouble.

You need to be very careful who you become an apprentice for. When any attorney gets into a law firm as an apprentice, the attorney should immediately get familiar with his or her surroundings and find the right attorney to apprentice for. One of the most important questions to ask is: ***What has happened to the people who have worked for this attorney in the past?***

There are good and bad people to work for in every law firm. You can generally tell that someone is good to work for by finding out what happened to people who worked for that person in the past--and if those people

succeeded. These are the sorts of people you want to find and work for. In addition to finding someone who has a track record of turning out successful apprentices, you want to find someone you feel comfortable working for. Every attorney needs at least one strong ally in his or her firm. Without this, the attorney generally does not have much to look forward to.

There are many bad people to be an apprentice for in a law firm. You should avoid these people--they will do you more harm than good. They will not look out for you, will not give you work, and will not protect you. The best thing that any young attorney can do is find a good builder to be an apprentice for.

The risk of not finding a good builder to apprentice for is that you will be completely on your own and turned into a commodity. Attorneys who do not have people sticking up for them and guiding them do not make partner, get laid off when work gets slow, and typically do not advance very far in their careers. You need other attorneys looking out for you and people who have your back. If you choose the wrong person or people, you will not have this.

**See [The People You Work and Associate with Can Either Make or Break You](#) for more information. They Choose the Wrong Firm to Apprentice in.**

The firm you choose to apprentice in is very important. The best law firm to apprentice in will have lots of work, people you can connect with, and people who can mentor you into being a strong builder--and more. The best law firms to be an apprentice in will also be hiring you with the idea that you can potentially stay for the long-term if you continue to develop as expected.

There are lots of bad law firms to apprentice in. Many law firms have a reputation for hiring lots of people when things get busy and letting them go when things slow down. [Shearman & Sterling](#) did this in the early 2000s, and its reputation has still not recovered. It was once one of the most trusted names in the legal profession but lost a great deal of its cache and trust in the legal community due to this lack of perceived loyalty. This blemish remains with the firm to this day. The reputation of the law firm, the history of what happens to people who join the law firm, the quality of the law firm, and more, are all very important to attorneys considering a place to apprentice.

There also are many law firms that are just plain unpleasant places to work, or do not have sophisticated or interesting matters, or have other negatives associated with them. The type of work you are given will have a significant, long-term impact on what happens to you. If you want to do complex commercial litigation and choose a firm that does mainly insurance defense, this will not help you. If you want to do significant corporate work and choose a firm that represents only small companies, you will not get the correct experience.

**See [How Important Is It to Work at a Major Law Firm?](#) for more information. They Choose to Be an Apprentice in the Wrong Location.**

The location where you apprentice is also important.

If you choose to apprentice in a huge city, the odds that you will be viewed and treated as more of a commodity increase; it is harder to get noticed in large cities. Many attorneys in New York City become so exhausted by the hours, the anonymity of working in giant firms, and the apparent lack of ability to advance that they give up the practice of law completely early in their careers.

If you apprentice in a small city, the odds that you will do sophisticated work decrease. This will impact your long-term prospects as an attorney. Many attorneys in smaller markets become more generalists than specialists. This limits their future potential.

If you choose to apprentice in a city without the reputation to support your practice area, this will limit you. For example, there are very few jobs for patent prosecutors in New York City (the billing rates are too high) and



most patent prosecutors would be better served to apprentice in other locations.

If you apprentice in an economically-depressed and limited area of the country, this will also permanently limit your potential. If you work in an area like this, you may never get good experience, or even if you advance to being a builder, there may not be much opportunity waiting for you.

You need to carefully choose the location of the country where you work as an apprentice. If you choose the wrong location, it will be difficult to advance to being a builder or to do so effectively.

**Please see the following articles for more information:**

**[Why Relocating to a Different Market Is the Greatest \(But Little Known Way\) for a Law Firm Attorney to Get Ahead in the Legal Profession](#)**

**[How to Relocate to Another Area of the Country as an Attorney](#)**

**[Why Every Attorney Should Look at Multiple Legal Markets When Doing a Job Search](#)**

**[They Let Their Egos Get Involved.](#)**

Many attorneys who are apprentices have large egos. They do not think it is fair they are doing someone else's work, they think they should make more money, they look at people in other professions who are more successful at their ages and want to be like them, they have difficulties taking criticism, they criticize the builders they work for, or they cannot sublimate their needs to those of the group. If an attorney's ego gets too involved as an apprentice, the attorney will always run into difficulty. The role of an apprentice is to serve others, to learn, and to allow the needs of others to take center stage. An apprentice is a soldier and not a general.

Far too many legal careers are ruined and fall apart at the apprentice stage because of the apprentice's ego. The apprentice simply is too headstrong to learn from others and follow direction. Many apprentices show up in law firms on day 1 and declare how the work is beneath them, how the conditions are unfair, how they are going to go [in-house](#) as soon as they can, and more. This is admitting failure right out of the gate. An apprentice always needs to learn how to follow and needs to follow before he or she can lead.

**Please see the following articles for more information:**

**[Flow, Your Ego and Your Career](#)**

**[Rolls Royces, Your Ego and Choosing Who You Are Controlled By](#)**

**[Do Not Be Controlled By Your Need to Feel Significant](#)**

**[They Jump around Too Much.](#)**

Many apprentices jump around too much and work at too many firms when they are just starting out. While there are many good reasons to switch firms (for example, to get more sophisticated work or to find a mentor), there are many reasons why attorneys should not hop from firm to firm. Once you have made several moves, the next firm you join is more likely to treat you as a soldier of fortune on temporary assignment to the highest bidder and not as a permanent member of the team. This is risky and not something you want. Once you get this reputation, no one is likely to ever take you under their wing--knowing that it is likely to be a waste of their time. Apprentices succeed to the degree that they can learn the ropes and get people around them to support them in the process.

**Please see the following articles for more information:**

**[The Right and Wrong Reasons to Switch Law Firms](#)**

**[Job Hopping: It Is Always About You](#)**

**[How to Explain "Job Hopping"](#)**

**[They Make Moves into Places Where They Are No Longer Apprentices.](#)**

Many apprentices do not enjoy being apprentices. They want power, respect, authority, and more

immediately. These sorts of attorneys take positions in small companies, start their own law firms, become law professors, become government employees, and go to public interest organizations--early in their careers. There is nothing wrong with any of this, of course, but taking these sorts of actions so early in an attorney's career is not always a good decision. The attorney who tries to get out of being an apprentice so early never develops fully as an attorney. The longer you are a follower, the longer you can be a leader. The more you learn as a follower, the better leader you can be. The need to be in authority too soon is often something that thwarts many otherwise very promising legal careers.

**Please see the following articles for more information:**

**[60 Nontraditional Jobs You Can Do with a Law Degree](#)**

**[Twelve Sexy Things You Can Do with a Law Degree That \(1\) May Make You Famous and \(2\) Do Not Require Practicing Law](#)**

**[Practicing Law Not the Only Option for Attorneys](#)**

**[They Become Overly Focused on Short-Term Rewards.](#)**

Many attorneys become overly focused on short-term rewards. They want to make as much money as they can as quickly as they can. Did you know that there are people who make over \$400,000 a year operating coffee carts? Not only that, but these are cash businesses. They make \$400,000-a-year selling colored water from a cart on the street corner. You can make that sort of money operating a coffee cart--if this is what you want to do with your career. That is more than you can make as an associate in a law firm. If your objective is to make money, there are a lot of things you can do. I know of a former massage therapist with no formal education who makes millions selling residential real estate.

The problem with being a real estate agent, or selling coffee, is that this is somewhat limiting. There is nothing of great societal importance going on, and you need to be out there serving coffee or driving from house to house your entire career. These are not the most respected professions--but they do offer the potential for quick rewards. If you stick with it as an attorney and fully learn the apprentice process and advance to being a builder, you can make more money, have more stability, and more long-term success than people in most other professions. You can do work that is important, where you are using your mind, and where you are respected for what you offer.

**[See The Top Reasons Why Making Money Is the Dumbest Thing Any Attorney Should Focus on When Joining a Law Firm](#)** for more information.

## **The Successful Builders**

After five or more years as an apprentice, most attorneys should rapidly--as if their lives depended on it--start making the transition from an apprentice to a builder. Most attorneys never make this transition. All they ever will be are apprentices. Once you have mastered being an apprentice (and you need to master this), it is time to make the transition to being a builder.

**[See Why Attorneys with 5+ Years of Law Firm Experience Are in Serious Trouble \(and Seven Steps They Need to Take to Save Their Legal Careers\)](#)** for more information.

The rewards for being a good builder are as follows:  
**Independence in Your Career.**

**[Once you become a builder, you have clients.](#)** Throughout your legal career, you will learn how to bring more and more clients into the fold. You will do work for these clients, and they will follow you if you move from firm to firm. You will be a trusted advisor, a partner, and someone who is needed. You can charge these clients for advice, and they will come back to you again and again if you do a good job for them. They also will refer

others to you. Instead of being dependent on your law firm to give you work, you will ideally have lots and lots of clients calling you and consistently feeding you work to do. This independence will empower you and make you feel much better about your job and give your career purpose.

Attorneys with large books of business are rarely stressed out about their legal career. In fact, they tend to be having a very good time. The stress and uncertainty that apprentices suffer--getting laid off, getting fired, not having enough work to do, whether more senior people like them or not, getting mentors, getting the right experience, and more--all goes away once an attorney becomes a builder.

If an attorney with business is not happy in his or her existing firm, the attorney with business can easily move firms. Law firms always have wide open doors for attorneys with business and, in fact, it is easier to get a position with a major law firm if you have a significant book of business (of the right kind) than if you are a graduate of a top law school seeking your first job with the firm. There are always more opportunities for builders in the market than there are for apprentices.

### **Authority in the Market.**

Instead of being a cog in the wheel, the builder becomes seen as an authority in the market. As an authority, the attorney can give talks, write papers, and be seen as someone who understands the subject matter and can give advice to companies and others. As an authority, the builder gets more respect and can bring in clients. People respect builders because builders have mastered being an apprentice and successfully navigated to being a builder.

**See [You Need to Be Seen as an Authority](#) for more information.**

### **Status Among Other Attorneys.**

Once an attorney has transitioned from being an apprentice to being a builder, the attorney gets much higher status among other attorneys. The ability to bring in work and support other attorneys gives you a far, far higher status than just being someone who does the work and is dependent on others. A builder has far higher status among attorneys than an apprentice.

**See [How to Easily Determine the Best Attorneys and Law Firms: The Five Prestige Levels of Attorneys and Law Firms](#) for more information.**

### **Growth and the Prospect of Continuous Growth.**

At some point, the apprentice stops growing. Many builders keep growing well into their 70s. I know of many builder-attorneys in their 70s with books of business in the tens of millions of dollars that keep increasing year after year and never slow down. If you are a good builder, you will continue growing all throughout your career. Many builders never retire because they are having so much fun and doing so well as builders.

**Please see the following articles for more information:**

**[How to Be a Successful Attorney](#)**

**[Two Things That the Most Successful 5% of Attorneys Do That the Rest Do Not](#)**

**[Why Networking Is Essential to Your Success as an Attorney](#)**

### **The Failed Builders**

People fail as builders due to the following reasons:

#### **They Never Become Builders.**

Most attorneys never become builders. In fact, the substantial majority of apprentices in most major law firms never become builders because they fail to plan to become builders. It takes time, effort, planning, strategy,



tactics, and sacrifice to make it through the apprentice stage and make it to the builder stage. Most attorneys end up leaving the law firm world before they even have the opportunity to be builders. This holds the attorneys back and permanently limits their career prospects.

### **They Do Not Plan to Become Good Builders.**

If you want to succeed as a law firm attorney and transition into being a builder, you need to plan for this to happen. Attorneys plan to become builders by taking numerous actions throughout their early careers to set themselves up to one day be builders:

**They get seen consistently by people likely to give them business.** An attorney trying to become a builder will find out how to be seen by the sorts of people who can give them business. They will write, speak, attend seminars, and do whatever they can to constantly be visible to people likely to give them business.

**They think about their practice area and how to be marketable in it.** Attorneys who want to be builders will always think about how they can position themselves in their practice areas to look as marketable as possible. They will try to develop an expertise that not a lot of other attorneys have and that allows them to stand out and look extraordinary and unique. They will think about how their public profile looks and work to develop this.

**They connect with people likely to give them business on an ongoing basis.** Attorneys who want to be successful builders become very interested in the sorts of events they attend, make sure they run into the right people, and connect on LinkedIn, via phone calls, email, and other ways with the sorts of people who can help them. Their antennas are always up and looking for good opportunities.

**They impress their colleagues, superiors, and everyone they come in contact with.** An attorney looking to be a builder will always be interested in impressing colleagues and everyone he or she comes into contact with because the attorney knows that these people can influence whether or not the attorney gets work now or in the future.

**They speak, write, and do other things likely to give them business.** Attorneys looking to get business always do what they can to be seen and become the first choice for potential clients looking to give out business. They want to be the only logical choice.

At every step of the way, attorneys who plan on becoming good builders are always doing what they can and thinking of tomorrow. They do this as junior associates, midlevel associates, and as senior associates. They want to be seen, liked, and they are always angling to position themselves for success.

**See [Top 9 Ways for Any Attorney to Generate a Ton of Business](#) for more information.**

### **They Let Their Egos Get in the Way of Becoming Good Builders.**

Many attorneys with the ability to be good builders end up sabotaging their legal careers early on because they let their egos get in the way. They fail to take the sides of their clients and make being an attorney more about them than their clients. They continually fight with attorneys in their firms about money-related issues. They become more consumed with their interests than those of their clients or their firm. Many become so ego-focused that they make catastrophic mistakes with their legal careers that end up hurting them and those who work with them. Many attorneys rise based on the power of their egos but fall based on their egos as well.

### **They Are Dishonest as Builders.**

Many attorneys--once they become builders--become quite dishonest. They end up sabotaging their careers by being dishonest, overbilling, cutting corners, and making other mistakes in an attempt to go farther than they are entitled to. If a builder is dishonest then he or she will get into trouble. I have seen far too many builders destroy their careers through dishonesty than I can count.

### **They Stop Trying Once They Become Builders.**

Many attorneys are elevated to partners on a temporary basis and made non-equity partners or income

partners. This is a builder title that is given to the best apprentices to give them time to prove themselves as builders. Most attorneys who are given this temporary "builder" title end up failing. They fail because they believe that they can continue doing what they are doing (billing lots of hours) and do not understand that they now need to direct their efforts into not just working hard but also into bringing in business. Their efforts now need to be directed into a new direction instead. Once someone is given the opportunity to be a builder, that person needs to direct his or her heart and soul into this new role and not squander it away.

### **They Choose the Wrong Firm to Be Builder In.**

If an attorney chooses the wrong firm to be a builder in, the attorney will be in trouble. The firm the attorney chooses should have ample opportunities for the attorney to bring in clients (no conflicts), have an environment that supports growth, and be the sort of law firm that clients respect. Furthermore, a general practice firm is also a benefit to many attorneys because they can refer work to other practice areas and get credit for this work. Additionally, there are numerous compensation models that law firms follow for builders. It is important that every builder joins a law firm with the right compensation model that gives him or her the most long-term potential.

**See [Which Type of Law Firm Is Best for You and Your Career: Main Offices of Large National Firms, Branch Offices of Large National Firms, Midsized Firms, Boutiques, or Newer Fast-Growing Firms?](#) for more information.**

### **They Choose the Wrong Location to Be a Builder In.**

A builder will succeed to the extent the builder is in a market that can support the builder with enough work and where there is demand for the work that the builder does. There also needs to be realistic prospects for the builder to generate work wherever the builder goes. In some instances, a large city will be too competitive. In other cases, a small market will not have enough work. Builders need to be in a market where they can maximize their skills and talents and get the most work.

### **Conclusions**

Something everyone has heard is that "the A students teach and the B students work for the C students." In the legal profession, the person with business has the power and controls the strings. The people with business in the legal profession are not always the most talented attorneys. They are the attorneys who have the ability to connect with people, to be seen in the marketplace, and to be there when clients have work to be referred to other attorneys. Also, people like referring work to them and feel like they will be taken care of by doing so. This is how it works with the most successful builder-attorneys. To become a builder, though, all attorneys need to first become successful apprentices. Far too many attorney fail as apprentices. Even fewer end up becoming successful builders.

**See the following articles for more information:**

**[Why You Are Unhappy Practicing Law: Soldiers and Generals in Law Firms](#)**

**[The Most Important Characteristic Attorneys Need to Succeed and Why It Is Almost Impossible for Them to Keep It](#)**

**[The Only Seven Reasons a Law Firm Will Make You a Partner](#)**

**[The 18 Most Important Decisions You Make with Your Legal Career](#)**

**[Don't Give Up! Why You Should Work with the Best Law Firm You Can as Long as You Can](#)**