

# Top 32 Reasons Attorneys Lose Their Jobs Inside of Law Firms

By Harrison Barnes



ATTORNEY SEARCH

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## Top 32 Reasons Attorneys Lose Their Jobs Inside of Law Firms

- There are numerous reasons why an attorney can lose his or her job.
- But the single fact of this is, at some point every attorney loses a job.
- It is for this reason that you as an attorney, especially if you're in a law firm, should be aware of certain instances that can lead to your termination.

**Summary:** Learn how to navigate the hidden dangers inside law firms that cause so many attorneys to lose their jobs in this article.

Over the past few decades as a legal recruiter, I have encountered numerous attorneys who have lost their jobs. In some of these cases, the attorney was at fault (intentional or otherwise). But in other cases, there was no fault on the part of the attorney. The law firm can be a minefield when it comes to hidden dangers that can cause an attorney to lose his or her job.

As a preliminary matter, it is important to note that most attorneys who choose to go the law firm route will lose their positions inside of law firms at some point in time. If you are inside of a law firm and have never lost your job, you are no different. Most attorneys will lose at least one job as either an associate or as a partner. Losing a position inside of a law firm is an almost inevitable result of choosing to work inside a law firm. It is important to do everything you can to make sure that you do not lose your job when you are working inside a law firm.

The purpose of this article is to make you aware of conditions that make it possible to lose your position and to help you understand what you must avoid in your performance to maximize the chances you will keep your job. Because most attorneys will lose their positions in law firms at some point in their careers, it is my feeling that this article should be required reading for any attorney looking to keep his or her job.

- **See [Top 9 Reasons Attorneys Lose Law Firm Jobs](#) for more information.**

Make no mistake about it: Losing your job inside of a law firm is a very serious thing. If you lose your job inside of a law firm, then your odds of finding a new one—with an equally prestigious law firm—are severely diminished. There is no sugarcoating the facts:

- It is extremely difficult to get a new position inside of a law firm if you have lost your position.
- Most **attorneys who lose their jobs inside of law firms** will have a next-to-impossible time finding a position inside of an equally prestigious law firm.
- A gap in your resume suggests that you lost a job—and law firms do not like this either and may ask about it for years.
- Often times when attorneys lose their jobs, they end up going in-house, being contract attorneys, working for the government, working as solo practitioners, and working in other roles. Most of these roles pay far less and have less “prestige” than law firm positions.
- It is extremely common for attorneys who lose their law firm positions to strike out on their own. Most earn nowhere near the salary they did when they were in a law firm—and many flounder.

Some, of course, put their disappointment and drive into doing great things with their careers and succeed—and many get new positions with great law firms. In fact, I have tons and tons of stories about attorneys who got fired and how that turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to them in all respects; however, this is not always the norm.

The majority of attorneys who go to work in major law firms are front-loading their compensation early in their careers. This is because most (certainly not all) of these attorneys will never earn as much money again. The goal, of course, should be to keep this going and, if possible, to never have to leave a law firm.

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

- **[Why You Should \(and Should Not\) Quit the Practice of Law](#)**
- **[Why You Should Quit Practicing Law](#)**
- **[15 Reasons You Should Not Quit the Practice of Law](#)**
- **[15 Reasons Law Firm Attorneys Should Not Look for New Jobs](#)**

Often when attorneys are losing their jobs, they are not aware of the warning signs or do not understand the reasons they lose their jobs. You should understand the conditions, mistakes, and other reasons that make you more likely to lose your job—

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either through your own fault or due to conditions in your firm that indicate something is coming down the line that is not good. Understanding the reasons below can help you avoid the “minefield” that awaits most attorneys inside of law firms.

Most attorneys (as should be expected from the environments they are in) live in constant fear of losing their positions. The most astute ones understand the “rules of the game” below.

- **See [Four Union-Like Rules of All Law Firms You Need to Know About](#) for more information.**

## 1. Your Hours Are Too Low

This is one of the most common reasons attorneys lose their jobs. If you have low hours, you should always expect that it is possible you could lose your job. Attorneys with low hours are always at risk of losing their jobs inside law firms. Most associates and partners who lose their positions do so due to low hours. Here are why hours are so important and what “higher ups” believe they mean:

- **If your hours are low, it means that others are not giving you work.** If others are not giving you work, the presumption is that they are not doing so because your work is not that good, you are difficult to work with, people do not like you—the list is endless. Beyond any single other indicator, low hours are the best measure of your performance inside of a law firm and whether or not you are doing a good job. The best attorneys and those easiest to work with get the most work and the poorest do not get as much.
- **The hours are an indicator of the health of your practice area.** Law firms have various “silos” that make up their businesses. For example, real estate is a silo, litigation is a silo, corporate can be many silos (capital markets, M & A, finance), patent law is a silo, tax law is a silo, and so forth. Each of these silos makes up “mini-businesses.” Well run law firms will hire and fire based on the productivity of attorneys in these practice areas.
- **The hours are an indicator of the overall health of your law firm.** Law firms are businesses and will fire people and reduce headcount if doing so is necessary to make money.

- **The hours are an indicator of how hard you are willing to work.** Hours have always been a measure of how hard you are willing to work. One of the more important career principles that all attorneys are expected to follow and understand is that they need to be able to make work and create work and not just do and hand in the work they are given. If they can complete an assignment quickly, then they should create and find other ways to bill more hours in a way that helps and protects the client: The best representation at large law firms is the most thorough. If an attorney does not know how to make work then the attorney's hours are likely to be low.
- **You need to be able to “pay your way” inside of every law firm. If you are not doing this, you could be without a job.** The way that compensation shakes out in most firms is relatively simple and works under the principle of “thirds”:
  - o One-third of the revenue from the hours you bill goes to your compensation,
  - o One-third goes to cover firm overhead (office space, IT staff, secretaries, paralegals and so forth); and,
  - o One-third goes to profit for firm partners.
  - o If your compensation is, for example, half of the collections the firm is getting for your work, you are going to be in trouble.
- **Even if you have very good hours, your hours will be compared to those you are working with, and if you are on the low end, you could lose your job.** Many law firms are extremely profitable because they are filled with attorneys who are willing to go “all in.” It is not uncommon for attorneys at law firms like this to work 2,500+ hours a year. If your practice area is teeming with people like this and you turn in a 1,900-hour performance— unless your work is extremely good—the firm can easily justify letting you go and give the work to others and increase its profitability.
- **Law firms attempt to “manipulate profits” by increasing the billing rates of associates and partners. This makes it difficult for all but the most aggressive and skilled to bill high hours.** As an attorney gets more senior, the number of hours that the attorney can bill decreases unless the attorney has very strong relationships with clients and partners within the firm willing to give the attorney work (this is because the senior attorney's billing rate gets too high). The same thing happens with partners: Their billing rates constantly increase, and this causes law firms to constantly increase billing rates as a way to ensure that only the best attorneys get high billable hours.

Hours have always been the best measure of an attorney's performance and the reason that partners and associates end up losing their jobs. If your hours are low, then the law firm will typically let you go.

As an additional point, it is important to note that there is no institutional memory for attorneys who may have billed a ton of hours in the past. For example, in corporate, litigation, and other practice areas, things can get very busy. Entire departments and the attorneys in them may bill 2,500 to 3,000+ hours for several years in a row when things are busy, the economy is very good, or the attorneys are working on a major case. Nevertheless, things can slow down suddenly: Deal flow can stall, and cases can settle and dry up. During recessions, corporate work often comes to a standstill. When the law changes (as it did for patent litigation when it became more difficult for patent trolls to file suit), entire departments come to a standstill and work stops. Despite the fact that the law firm may have earned incredible profits from its partners, associates and staff during boom times, these profits are not “banked.” If things slow down, most law firms will immediately start laying people off with abandon. Past service has already been paid for, and there are just a few firms that are willing to buckle down and endure slow times.

Your role inside a law firm is to bill as many hours as possible. The more hours you bill the better. You can hold on to your job and advance based on the number of hours that you bill.

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

- [Law Firm Economics and Your Career](#)
- [The BCG Attorney Search Guide to Basic Law Firm Economics and the Billable Hour: What Every Attorney Needs to Understand to Get Ahead](#)

## **2. You Do Not Have Enough Business**

Attorneys without business are at the mercy of their law firms and the partners they are working for. If you are dependent upon your law firm for business, guidance, and protection, it will almost never end well. If you do not “grow up” and make the transition from someone who is doing work for others to someone bringing in your work, you will almost always experience difficulties in your career—and need to jump between jobs



(and often states) when there is no work for you to do in your existing firm. You will feel disillusioned and helpless at some point. The less time you spend on developing business, the more difficulty you will experience in your career in the long run.

I spend a great deal of each day speaking with very talented and motivated attorneys at the senior level who are in trouble because they do not have enough business. This is happening to attorneys at all points in time, in virtually every firm there is. You cannot escape it.

Here are some additional points to consider about the importance of not relying on others for business and why this will almost always lead to your downfall inside of most law firms.

- **The attorneys giving you work will often switch firms and may leave you behind.**

Many attorneys have very good runs. Some attorneys get a mentor early in their careers. This mentor will feed them work from the time they are junior associates until they can help them make partner in their law firm. I have seen this happen numerous times and it can work. If you are exceedingly lucky, it can last your entire career.

What ends up happening a great deal of the time, though, is that at some point in his or her career, that senior attorney with all of the work may want to switch firms—or he or she may even be forced to. Regardless of how loyal the senior attorney may be to you, the senior attorney may not always be able to take you with him or her. When law firms hire lateral attorneys with more than 5-8+ years of experience, they often make the business a requirement for the lateral attorney. I cannot tell you how many times I have seen senior attorneys like this leave their firms and leave senior “worker bees” behind. When this happens, you will often be in a great deal of trouble. The law firm you are left at will have very little interest in giving you work, but will instead be interested in getting rid of you as quickly as possible. I talk to attorneys in this situation several times a month.

- **The senior attorney giving you work may get sick, die, or retire.**

While in an ideal world all of this work would be transferred to you, this is not something that regularly happens. The client has a relationship with and trusts the senior attorney to completely handle and oversee the client’s matters, but not necessarily you. This is true even if you are in your 50s and have been working

for the client for 25 years on behalf of the partner. On the other hand, I have seen this work out, and it often does, but it works out just about as often as it does not. Moreover, these relationships are often “screwed up” by other attorneys in your law firm who smell blood, go around you, and try and activate these relationships themselves. This will turn off many of these clients and they will be even more likely to leave.

- **The people giving you work may run out of work themselves.**

Even if you manage to maintain close relationships with one or more attorneys in your firm, these attorneys may slow down and run out of work themselves. If the people giving you work to do run out of work, you will suffer the pain and consequence of this. Even if they do not completely run out of work, they will be more likely to do the work themselves rather than give you the work to do.

- **The longer you wait to get business the greater your eventual pain will be.**

The worst hit tends to be attorneys with major law firms, in large cities, who get comfortable making very large salaries inside of large law firms for a decade or more. Their income keeps going higher and higher, and they and their families adjust to these incomes. They can purchase nice homes, cars, take vacations, and start adopting the spending habits of upper-middle-class individuals. Eventually, if an attorney does not have business, this will all come to an abrupt and rapid end. They may spend months searching for a position, and whether or not the position is inside of another law firm, in-house, or otherwise, the salaries are almost never anywhere near what they used to be. Divorces are very, very common and unfortunate—the stress of not living up to an attorney’s expectations for themselves can carry over into their home life.

- **Most people are out for themselves, including the people giving business to you**

Attorneys who feed business to others are human beings and have families and others to protect as well. They will almost always protect these other allegiances first, and if their work slows down, they will circle the wagons around themselves first. A career is a long-term proposition. You may be able to rely on someone to give you work for five, ten, or even fifteen years. Nevertheless, that person is likely to experience issues at some point in their career as well. When their work slows down, they switch firms, get sick, die, or experience problems of some kind, you are likely to be negatively affected.

- **There are very few law firms where you can survive for very long without your own business.**

Unless you have your own business, it is hard to survive for long in most law firms. If you do not have your own business, the law firm may allow you to stay beyond your welcome for a few years, but they will almost always expect you to leave. They want older attorneys to have business and younger ones to do the work. There are major exceptions to this, of course. There is the counsel attorney, the service partner, the contract partner, and other titles that firms use for people without significant business or management responsibility for clients. The issue everyone in this role understands, of course, is that they will almost always be the first to go if things start to slow down in your firm.

- **Large law firms are more dangerous than smaller ones.**

Larger law firms typically have less interest in developing associates and others to develop business. They want their associates working as hard as possible on the work in front of them (that tends to be done on behalf of major institutional clients). Instead of grooming them to get business (as much smaller and medium law firms do), the large law firm is more likely to view their attorneys as expendable and easily replaceable as they get more senior. They want young, hungry attorneys working hard at the lower levels and they want their attorneys without business to leave as they get more senior.

- **The only way you can create security is on your own.**

Unless you develop business, you will almost always not have any employment security in the legal business. If you have business and strong relationships, those clients will be willing to move with you to other law firms. The only way to ever truly have security in the legal business is if you have your own portable business.

I hate to unnecessarily belabor the point, but it merits massive emphasis: More attorneys lose their jobs inside of law firms because of a lack of business than any other reason.

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

- [Top 9 Ways for Any Attorney to Generate a Ton of Business](#)
- [Five Effective Strategies for Law Firm Partners to Get Business and Clients](#)
- [Should I Try and Get Business for My Firm or Should I Try to Bill More Hours?](#)

- [Making Rain: Ingredients for Success](#)
- [The Second-Best Way for a Law Firm Partner to Do Business Development](#)
- [The Importance of Portable Business](#)
- [Take This GIFT for Granted and Your Legal Career Will Be Dead](#)
- [What Law Firm Titles Mean: Of Counsel, Non-Equity Partner, Equity Partner Explained](#)

### 3. You Are among the Least Qualified among the Attorneys in Your Class

I hate to bring this up—as I do all things that are controversial—but when things get slow, or even when they are not, the attorneys who are the least qualified in a class of associates tend to be some of the first to go. What does least qualified mean? It means you went to the worst law school and have the poorest qualifications. This does not apply to all law firms, of course, and I hate to make this stereotype—but I have observed this, and it merits discussion.

When an associate, counsel, or any attorney is doing work for a partner, the partner is typically sharing that attorney's resume and qualifications with the client. Clients love to see stuff like “[Harvard Law School](#),” order of the coif and other qualifications on attorneys' resumes. They do not like to see stuff like “[Thomas Cooley Law School](#)” if they are paying high rates and expecting the best. Partners may assign work and hire and fire based on the qualifications of their attorneys. Law firms are businesses, and they are selling the quality of their people.

- In some firms, it is more difficult for attorneys to get work from partners if they do not have top qualifications.
- Because it is more difficult for these attorneys to get work more often, it is more difficult for them to maintain high hours.
- Many law firms will value attorneys with top qualifications more than they will value those without top qualifications.

Many attorneys manage to somehow get into major, important law firms despite not having the best qualifications on paper. During the “economic boom” in corporate work in the 2000s, I saw numerous attorneys from Pace Law School and other less-highly ranked schools get positions with major New York law firms: They were the first to go when things slowed down. Attorneys at the tops of their classes from local law schools

regularly get positions in top law firms. While it is not always the case, these attorneys are often the first to go.

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

- [How Much Does the Law School You Went to Matter When You Lateral Firms?](#)
- [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](#)

#### **4. You Are among the Last Hired in Your Class, and the Law Firm Needs to Let People Go**

If you are among the last hire in your class, a law firm will often let you go before it lets go of attorneys with more seniority. Despite the fact that it rarely happens as often as it used to in large law firms, law firms like the idea of nurturing attorneys up the chain—all the way from summer associate through partner. The idea of institutional memory and continuity is something that is extremely important to most law firms.

If you have been at a law firm one year and someone else has been there for five years, your odds of keeping your job are going to be lower than the attorney who was at the firm for five years. Law firms will often value loyalty and continuity over talent when they are letting people go for economic reasons.

- [See The Top 5 Long-Term Benefits of Remaining Employed with a Single Law Firm for more information.](#)

#### **5. You Undermine a Superior in the Law Firm**

This is a very common reason why attorneys lose their positions inside of major law firms. I see this regularly. There are all sorts of ways to undermine a superior, and this happens with astonishing regularity inside of most major law firms.

People have various needs. To survive, people need to feel secure that their source of social relationships, income, and other needs are met. Anything that interferes with any of this is met with a harsh reaction. People need food, shelter, and one another to

survive. If you interfere with any of these needs and make your superiors feel insecure, you are likely to find yourself in a position where your job is at risk.

In all law firms, there are soldiers and there are generals. Soldiers carry out orders and generals give them. Some generals are thick-skinned, and others are thin-skinned. The thin-skinned general is most likely to fire you if you upset him or her or put his or her social, financial, and other needs at risk. When you do anything to undermine someone's security (personal, professional, or financial), that person's reaction will be to "lash out" and do the same to you. They are trying to protect themselves, and attorneys often do not understand the myriad ways that they can undermine someone's security. If you undermine someone else, you will find that they will do the same to you. They will waste no time doing so. If you help someone be more secure, then they are more likely to want to help you and keep you around. If you make someone feel less secure, you will get exactly the opposite reaction.

- **See [Why You Are Unhappy Practicing Law: Soldiers and Generals in Law Firms](#) for more information.**

I have witnessed attorneys get fired inside of major law firms for scores of "infractions" against their superiors (and the firm) over the past several years. Here are some of the things I have seen:

- **An attorney questions the necessity of an assignment that may or may not be necessary.**

I have seen numerous attorneys fired for this sort of thing. When a law firm brings in work, and has a client ready, willing, and able to pay for the work, the last thing the attorney should do is get in the way of this. Partners are typically compensated for a percentage of the work that they and others do on a matter they bring in. If you are asked to write a memo about some mundane point of law, and it costs \$20,000 of your time, the lawyer that asked you to do that may get \$5,000 of that. If you tell him or her it is unnecessary and make a big stink about why it is not necessary, that attorney will not get that \$5,000. You are threatening his or her livelihood. If you proceed to gossip among other attorneys about why this is not necessary, you will create even more issues for yourself. You will identify yourself as not being on the same team as the law firm and its generals when it comes to making money, and you will lose your job. This is very common. Regardless of your analysis of the situation,

you are not the general; you are a soldier. It is none of your business, and your role is to put your head down and do the work.

- **An attorney does not bill as many hours as possible on an assignment like the attorney is supposed to.**

This is a derivative of the above. When there is work to be done, this is a blessing for most law firms and the attorneys who have it. If you are constantly looking for ways to be ultra-efficient and cut corners with your work, this is something that may not help your firm. It is your firm's business (and not yours) if the firm chooses to write off your hours or not (which firms often do). Lawyers do get fired and punished (at some—and certainly the majority—of firms) for being far too efficient.

- **An attorney takes credit for work that a superior may want credit for.**

The egos of senior attorneys often depend on them taking credit for brilliant insights and other things that can make them look good to their peers and clients. While it may be important for you, it is never a good idea to take credit for anything unless credit is given. This undermines the security of those above you and they will often take it out on you.

- **An attorney undermines the entire firm over something.**

If an attorney says something about the law firm publicly that gets back to the law firm, the attorney can lose his or her job. I once saw an attorney lose a job for talking to a reporter about a case. The client was upset with the attorney and complained to the law firm about it.

- **An attorney talks behind a superior's back.**

Unless you are saying something positive, you have very little right to “free speech” when it comes to speaking your opinion about your superiors both inside and outside of work. Here are some of the reasons I have seen attorneys fired inside of law firms when they made their opinions known—in many cases the attorneys did not even know for sure if this was why they were fired but expected this was the reason.

- **An attorney says a superior attorney is overbilling.**

If an attorney says a superior attorney is overbilling (to a peer or anyone else) the attorney's job will be at risk.

- **An attorney questions the judgment of a superior.**

- o **An attorney talks about a superior's drinking, drug use, marriage problems, fidelity, or speculates negatively about a senior attorney's personal life.**

This is another big one. You should never say anything about a superior's bad behavior. You do not even want to know about it. If the attorney believes you are not on his or her team and are against him or her, the attorney's reaction will be to view you as a threat and eliminate you. The people you work for want to preserve their reputations and careers as much as you do. If they see you as a threat they will hit back.

- o **An attorney makes fun of a superior about something.**

It could be the attorney's age, weight, baldness—who knows. Some people are very sensitive and demand respect. If you upset someone in power, his or her way of hitting back will often be to let you go or freeze you out.

Each of the things above can **get you fired in a law firm**.

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

- [The One Simple Rule for Succeeding in a Law Firm](#)
- [Concentrate on the Positive, Not the Negative](#)
- [The Top Five Ways to Be Positive \(When Everyone and Everything around You Is Bringing You Down\)](#)

## **6. You Act Out Your Anger at Management**

Attorneys often get angry with the management of their firms for a variety of reasons. They may be angry at their firm about pro bono commitment, not getting promoted, being asked to work too many hours, the firm's failure to take their sides on an issue, compensation, their bonus, and a variety of issues. When acting out their anger, attorneys may make their anger known to management, bill fewer hours, express their dissatisfaction to clients, express their dissatisfaction to other attorneys, and more.

Most law firms will listen to your concerns. Very few of the best law firms are so thin-skinned that they cannot listen to criticism. However, if you act out your anger against the management of your firm, you run the risk that the law firm will simply circle the wagons and end up letting you go or pushing you out.



The management of the law firm is the one in power. Even partners with business quickly find that if they are upset about a given matter and express it to the law firm management and hold on to their grudge, the natural response will be for the firm to push them out. If you are upset with the management of your law firm, the last thing you should do is act out. The best thing to do is find a new job.

When I was a summer associate at a New York firm that no longer exists, I watched an associate loudly complain to the management of the firm about the firm's pro bono program. Over the following weeks, I saw partners in the firm harshly reviewing his work and creating all sorts of issues for him. The attorney that had complained in his memos and in a meeting was suddenly on the outs. By the end of the summer, the associate was gone.

- [See Why Most Attorneys Are Angry for more information.](#)

## 7. You Are Too Senior

Senior can mean a lot of different things. As mentioned above, an attorney with more than 5+ years of experience without any business is always at risk of losing his or her job. If you are senior and do not have business, your billing rates rise and rise until they are similar to partners. Since partners make more money when they do their work, it becomes more difficult for you to get work. Furthermore, most law firms follow an “up and out” model and rely on a constant influx of “hungry” new talent. The more senior you are the more difficulties you will have, unless you have business. Many law firms now also have mandatory retirement ages where you will be expected to leave due to your age.

Seniority is one of the most common reasons attorneys lose their positions in law firms.

### See the following articles for more information:

- [The “Senior Attorney Trap”](#)
- [Senior Associates - How to Make Oneself More Marketable to Law Firms](#)
- [Top 10 Reasons Why Older Attorneys Have a More Difficult Time Getting Law Firm Jobs](#)

## 8. Your Ego Is Too Large

Attorneys with large egos can get pushed down and expelled by many law firms. The healthier the law firm, the more likely the attorney is to be expelled by the law firm for ego-related issues. The problems with your ego can take a variety of forms. Here are some categories of attorneys who sometimes have large egos.

- Young attorneys who have not been practicing very long.
- Attorneys moving from major law firms to smaller firms.
- Attorneys moving from prestigious law firms to less prestigious law firms.
- Attorneys from top law schools.
- Attorneys moving from major markets to smaller markets.
- Attorneys who think they are smarter than those around them.

Confidence is good in the legal profession, of course, but it can also get you into trouble. When you join a law firm and believe you are smarter or better than those around you, this can get you into major difficulty. The human reaction is to show you that you are not better than those around you. If your behavior upsets those around you, they will show you that you are not justified in such a high opinion of yourself by letting you go. I've seen many attorneys lose their jobs based on "holier than thou" behavior.

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

- [Flow, Your Ego and Your Career](#)
- [Rolls Royces, Your Ego and Choosing Who You Are Controlled By](#)
- [Rap Stars, House Managers, Crystal Meth, Prison, and Your Ego](#)
- [Don't Let Your Ego Affect Your Offer](#)

## 9. You Make Clear to Peers and Superiors There Is Something Else You Would Rather Be Doing

Many attorneys join law firms and make it clear to their superiors that they do not intend to stay around long unless they are challenged, are advanced, and get the recognition they deserve. They tell other attorneys they would rather start their own business, run their firm, and various statements along these lines. Many times, these

same attorneys question the wisdom of being an attorney, practicing law, and make similar pronouncements.

The problem with making these sorts of statements to your peers is that they almost always get back to your superiors. When your superiors hear there is a lack of commitment from you, they feel a corresponding lack of interest in mentoring you and keeping you around. Why would they? If a law firm believes an attorney is not committed to the firm, why should the law firm be committed to the attorney? The law firm has no incentive to commit to an attorney who wants to be doing something else.

The other important thing to consider is that when you are making statements like this, your work will probably also show this as well. If you are not committed, you will not work your hardest, give your best effort, or be willing to persevere when things get difficult for you.

You may not get fired for your opinions outright, but most firms will find reasons to let you go for other reasons that may seem to come out of left field. You should never express any lack of commitment to law firms. This is something that can damage you a great deal and end your career.

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

- [The #1 Attorney Career Killer That Attorneys Are Never Taught](#)
- [Be Committed to What You Do](#)
- [The Only Thing That Matters Is Commitment](#)

## **10. Your Activities Outside of Work**

Many attorneys make the mistake of believing their personal lives and work lives are two separate things. While there is some truth to this, there are limits to this as well. Law firms are quick to penalize you if you do anything outside of work that they believe in any way reflects negatively on them. Lawyers are expected to conduct themselves in a way that reflects positively on the profession outside of work. Here are some things I have seen attorneys do outside of work that caused them to lose their law firm jobs:

- A Facebook post that stated the attorney did not enjoy practicing law.

- An attorney accused of beating up his wife in divorce proceedings.
- An attorney arrested for hiring a prostitute.
- An attorney accused of a crime.
- An attorney with a personal blog that discussed personal details about the attorney's life, which the firm did not believe was appropriately aired in public.

Anything that in any way brings up public questions of your moral character will often result in law firms letting you go. If you do something outside of work that offends the moral sensibilities of your law firm—or brings into question your commitment to practicing law—there is a good chance that you may lose your job inside of a law firm. It happens all the time.

One thing I have noticed is that different firms react in different ways to an attorney's actions outside of work. This means, essentially, that the cultures of some law firms are more tolerant than others. I know of law firms where the partners and associates behave outside of work in ways that would shock the conscience—which is the norm. Part of doing an effective job search is ensuring that you find firms where your behavior outside of work will not put your job constantly at risk. While I am not condoning any negative behaviors, the issue to be aware of is that you should try to be in a firm where you can be yourself.

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

- [Four Fatal Mistakes Highly Qualified Attorneys Make When Choosing Law Firms](#)
- [How Attorneys Destroy Their Careers by Choosing the Wrong Law Firms](#)
- [Find an Employer with Similar Values](#)

## **11. You Want Too Much Money from Your Firm**

Many attorneys believe they should be making much more money than they are.

- They may have gone to great law schools but have not been able to get jobs with the highest paying firms and are upset that they are not getting as much money as their peers.

- They may have moved firms after losing a job or moved to another market and not be getting as much money as they were in a prior job.
- The attorney may be in a law firm that did not raise salaries after other law firms raised theirs.
- The attorney may be extremely unhappy with his or her bonus.
- They may be a partner in a law firm and become extremely vocal about what they feel is poor and unjustifiably low compensation.
- They may be a staff or contract attorney and feel they should be making as much as full-fledged associates.

I have noticed something over and over in my career: Anytime an attorney is very unhappy with the attorney's compensation and makes a big deal out of it with the attorney's firm, the attorney typically ends up losing his or her job. I do not know why this is, but I have a theory: Anytime someone demands more than others and is unhappy, that person upsets the apple cart and is a threat to the management of the firm. The management of the firm is typically managing as well as it can. The management of the firm is making do with the revenue it has at its disposal. If any attorney threatens this, the attorney is doing so at the attorney's peril. It is very risky to threaten or otherwise undermine the system. If one attorney is very upset and makes a big deal out of this, the management feels that unless this attorney is let go, the management will lose control of the situation.

If you are unhappy with your compensation, the best thing you can do is keep quiet and make the most of it or look for a new job. You should not make your dissatisfaction known if possible. Once you make your dissatisfaction known, you risk your job and future. This sounds ridiculous, I know, but this is the way it is.

You threaten the security of the leaders of your firm when you complain, and this does not help you, it hurts you.

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

- [Top 10 Reasons Why High Junior Associate Salaries Are Destroying the Legal Profession](#)
  - [When Asked about "Salary Expectations" in an Interview How Should I Respond?](#)
-

## 12. You Question the Quality of a Superior's Work, Intellect, and Abilities

If an attorney questions the quality of work of a superior, the superior will often let the attorney have it and take it out on the attorney by firing the attorney in response. There are many attorneys in major law firms who managed to get ahead despite not being the smartest, the most thorough, the best writers, or the best legal minds. They have other extraordinary skills that enabled them to get where they are, and chief among those is knowing how to delegate work. If you find this sensitivity and talk about it behind a superior's back, the superior will reward you for this behavior by letting you go. You cannot harm anyone's reputation or security.

You cannot question the quality of your superior's intellect and abilities and expect to get away with it. Your superior's reaction will be to let you go. Your job is to be a soldier by assisting and building up your superiors, not tearing them down.

- **See [Bad Manners, Rumors, and Your Career](#) for more information.**

## 13. A Stupid Mistake at an Office Party, Retreat, or Other Engagement

This typically involves drinking, but it does not have to. If an attorney gets too drunk at a Christmas party, it will often call into question the attorney's judgment and hurt the attorney long into the future. Most of the time, these mistakes involve mistakes such as the following:

- An inappropriate remark.
- An unwelcome advance.
- Making fun of a superior.
- Getting "falling down" drunk.
- Public displays of affection with colleagues.

Since people reading this may be wondering what sort of mistakes others have made in the past, let me give you a few examples I have seen over the years.

- I was on a retreat with a law firm one year and an attorney got drunk and was sitting drinking with the General Counsel of a major corporation. Whether it was welcome or not, he made a remark about her breasts in front of a bunch of other attorneys. This was during a night of drinking that lasted several hours longer and where

everyone present seemed to have let this go quite quickly. Nevertheless, when the management of the firm found out about this, the attorney was let go immediately.

- I know a young partner at a major law firm that got extremely drunk at a firm Christmas party and needed to be helped to a cab by a couple of colleagues. He was spoken to about this by older partners and a few months later was told to find a new job despite being very busy and billing a lot of hours.
- I know of one attorney who was at a party, got drunk and told a circle of other attorneys how incompetent he believed a local judge was. Despite the fact that this did not even involve anyone inside of the law firm, the firm felt this damaged its reputation to such a great extent with the local judges that the firm let the attorney go.
- I know one attorney who put on a “skit” at a law firm party that was considered offensive to a certain non-majority group inside the firm. This attorney ended up being let go for the skit.

You need to be extremely careful what you do and say inside of law firms. Law firms are very sensitive places, and you can get fired for a variety of things. As an attorney, you are expected to be very sensitive to the opinions of those around you.

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

- [10 Biggest Career Mistakes Big Law Firm Attorneys Make \(and 10 Ways to Survive in a Big Firm\)](#)
- [The Biggest Mistakes Fresh Attorneys Make Regarding How They Are Perceived by Peers and Supervisors](#)

## **14. The Firm Is Under New Management after a Merger**

When firms come under new management after a merger, they will often eliminate a great number of attorneys as part of the merger. One might believe that the merger is done to increase the number of attorneys, but that is only part of the story. A merger is a combination of two businesses. When two businesses combine loyalties, inefficiencies are often eliminated in the name of progress. The goal is to make the law firm more efficient and raise profits per partner. This is done in the following ways:

- **The new firm will often rapidly cut partners without substantial business. They will give this work to the partners with business and, if possible, associates.**

This is very common. Partners without business are a liability and a cost center, not a profit center. These partners are often the first to go.

- **The new law firm will often cut senior associates, counsel, and partners near retirement age.**

This is a class of attorneys that is most vulnerable because they are often quite expendable.

- **The new firm will cut the associates with the lowest hours.**

The presumption is that the associates with the lowest hours are the attorneys who do the worst work—or, simply, that they have reached their full capacity. The law firm will let these attorneys go.

- **The new law firm will often cut the least profitable practice areas (and the attorneys in them).**

Practice areas that are vulnerable include labor and employment (where billing rates are often lower), patent prosecution (where it is difficult for large law firms to make a profit), trust and estates (more of a service to firm clients than a profit center), and any practice area that the firm is not that strong in.

- **The new law firm will often do a “wholesale elimination” of unprofitable offices.**

Law firms may have offices all over the world, but certain offices may be more profitable than others. During a merger, the law firm will look to get rid of all of its unprofitable offices. Some of the attorneys from these offices may be of use to the new firm (attorneys in desirable practice areas, attorneys with business), but most will not.

- **The dominant law firm in the merger will most often impose its will on the less dominant law firm, where the majority of the cuts will be made.**

The dominant law firm in a merger will typically be the one that has the greatest overall profit to add to the equation. This law firm will have more power typically when it comes to determining who will stay and who will go.

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

- [Law Firm Mergers: Why Law Firms Join Forces](#)
- [Should I Stay or Should I Go: What Should Partners Do When Their Firm Merges with Another Firm?](#)



## 15. You Take an Extended Leave (Or Multiple Leaves)

There is nothing wrong with taking a leave of absence from a law firm, of course. People take leaves of absence from law firms all the time. They take them to have children, for health reasons, and others that are well within the realm of reasonableness. Despite this, if this leave is questioned in its necessity (i.e., it lasts longer than the firm believes it should and beyond the realm of [perceived] reasonableness), you can be penalized and often are.

If the law firm believes that your leave has been too long and that your desire was to do something else rather than practice law, you can be badly hurt. To be clear, I am not talking about a leave of a few months—I am talking about any leave that is several months (or longer) in duration and that the powers that be start gossiping about among themselves, saying that it is too long. Each law firm is different, of course, and I am not a judge of what too much time for a leave is.

What I have noticed over the course of my career is that when an attorney takes an extended leave, the attorney's return to the firm is often short-lived. Often the attorney lasts less than a year after the attorney returns to the law firm. Sometimes it is only a few weeks.

There is an unspoken rule in the legal profession that once an attorney starts practicing law, the attorney should not stop for an extended period. I am not sure why that is—perhaps it is a reflection of the attorney's commitment, or possibly it is a reflection of the fact that attorneys believe skills become rusty, or politics, and other inside matters of the firm change in their absence.

The problem with the extended leave is that when an attorney returns, the attorney does so to a firm that has likely changed in his or her absence. Colleagues may have left, clients may have gone away, and the attorney will no longer have the inside track into what is going on inside of the law firm. Alliances change, loyalties change, and so forth.

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

- [Taking a Hiatus from Practicing Law](#)

- [Why You Can Never Stop Practicing Law for More Than a Few Weeks Once You Start](#)
- [Taking Time Off from Practicing Law: How Will It Impact Your Future Marketability?](#)

## 16. Sexual Harassment-Related Allegations

I hate to bring this up since it is such a hot button. I speak with attorneys at least once every few months who have been accused of sexual harassment by secretaries, fellow attorneys, and others. This never ends well. Here are some recent examples:

- A junior partner is fired for making remarks about his secretary's appearance to her more than once. He is immediately fired when she complains.
- A senior patent associate asks out multiple female associates he is supervising over the course of several months. The female associates all get together and call a meeting with firm management, in which they state they refuse to work with him. He is fired.
- A counsel level attorney starts dating an associate in the firm. They break up, and she files a restraining order against him when he repeatedly tries to rekindle the relationship. He is fired.

These are all examples I have encountered over the past several months.

- [See How to Handle Sexual Harassment in Law Offices](#) for more information.

## 17. You Experience Long-Term Substance Abuse Problems (or Have Substance Abuse Problems)

From what I have read, lawyers have a higher-than-average percentage of substance abuse problems compared to other professions. If these substance abuse problems are not controlled, and the firm believes they are interfering with your work, you will often lose your job. The firm may not mention this as the reason it is letting you go, but if it believes that your substance abuse is interfering with your job, then it is likely to let you go due to this abuse. Lawyers with substance abuse problems are often able to move from firm to firm for years (or even decades) and tend to move when the problem gets too well known and harms their internal brand in the law firm. They then will start at new law firms and function there as long as possible until the symptoms of this become evident and well-known again, at which point they will move again.

See the following articles for more information:

- [Attorneys Have Problems with Drinking](#)
- [One in Three Attorneys Are Alcoholics](#)
- [Another Big Law Attorney I Know Just Died Young](#)

## **18. Attorneys Who Refuse to Do Certain Assignments or Types of Work (or Are Uncooperative in Doing So)**

Attorneys are expected to “pitch in” and do whatever they can to assist the firm in succeeding when there is work to be done. Unfortunately, many law firm attorneys take the position that they should only be doing the sort of work that they want to be doing. I have seen several attorneys let go for this sort of attitude, and almost overwhelmingly, the attorneys who run into trouble from this tend to be younger attorneys. However, even older attorneys are not immune.

Many attorneys believe that their law firms should be giving them the sort of work that they want to do—and not the other way around.

- Some attorneys believe they should be getting early trial or deposition experience.
- Some attorneys believe they should be doing work only on behalf of public companies and not smaller companies.
- Some attorneys want more contact with individuals and not just faceless companies.
- Some attorneys want to do only white-collar litigation and not general litigation.
- Some real estate attorneys only want to do leasing and not sales transactions.
- Some patent attorneys only want to work on semiconductor-related patents and not mechanical patents.
- Some litigators do not want to work on insurance defense-related work and only want to do commercial litigation.
- Some tax attorneys only want to do federal and not state tax work.

I come across these sorts of examples every single day. The correct response is to try and get the work you can at your firm with time—not turn down work. If you turn down work, you are not supporting the people who give you work. This will end badly. This is insubordinate, and you will very quickly find yourself out of a job if you turn down work.

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I have seen this happen far too many times in my career than I can count. If you do not do the work your firm gives you, the firm will give it to someone else. The firm will believe you are not a team player and it will end up harming you tremendously in the long run.

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

- [Life Supports What Supports Life](#)
- [Your Commitment Needs to Defy Explanation](#)

## **19. Lying on Your Resume**

If you lie on your resume, you risk being found out eventually. When you are found out, you will almost always lose your job. I see this happen at least a few times a year. The lying can be about anything—I have watched people get fired for lying about:

- Dates of employment
- A firm they were fired from (leaving it off their resume)
- Bar admissions
- Graduating from law school
- Undergraduate degrees
- Grade point averages

I do not know why people lie on their resumes—it almost always does more harm than any possible good that can come from it.

- **[See How Not to Get the Job of Your Dreams for more information.](#)**

## **20. Your Collections Are Low Vis-a-Vis the Number of Hours You Bill**

Many attorneys have a difficult time collecting for all of the hours that they bill. Whether partner or associate, their hours may seem unjustified, are questioned, and they can lose their jobs over this. If your collections are low compared to the number of hours you bill, you may lose your position.

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

- [The Difficulties of Delinquent Accounts in Law Firms](#)
- [Overhead Ratios of a Law Firm](#)

## **21. You Are Caught Lying**

I have seen countless attorneys lose their jobs for lying. If you lie at a law firm, the law firm will presume it cannot trust you. If a law firm believes it cannot trust you, then it will often let you go.

- I recently saw an attorney let go for lying on an expense report. The difference was \$100 and he blamed it on a misplaced keystroke. Nevertheless, he signed the expense report and turned it in. He was let go for this error.
- I have seen attorneys let go for lying about being done with an assignment when they were not.

If a law firm catches you lying, it will most often let you go. Law firms have little tolerance for lying.

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

- [Why Law Job Applicants Should Never Lie about Their Qualifications](#)
- [Credibility and Your Legal Career](#)

## **22. The Firm Is Slowing Down in Its Work**

Law firms that are slowing down in their work will often let attorneys go as quickly as they can. Even if your hours are good, if the law firm is slowing down in its work, then the law firm may become anxious because it does not have an idea of what is coming down the pike. When a law firm believes that its work is about to slow down, rather than delay the inevitable, it will often start letting attorneys go.

The problem with work slowing down is that when this occurs, the law firm may not always blame a slowdown in work as the reason for letting you go. Instead, the firm may blame you and your performance. From a psychological standpoint, this is often devastating to attorneys who previously believed they were doing a good job at work.

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Rather than blaming economic conditions, or the firm's ability to get work, the equation is turned around on the vulnerable attorney who may not know what is going on and what to make of the attack on the quality of the attorney's work. The attorney may be told that he or she made a typographical error on an important document, has a bad attitude, believes he or she is not a good fit, upset partners in the firm—who knows. The law firm may use every means at its disposal to make the firing about you and not the firm.

- **See [Why Every Big Firm Practice Area Eventually “Self-Destructs” at Least Once Every Eight Years](#) for more information.**

## 23. An Attorney Sued for Malpractice

Attorneys sued for malpractice will often be fired from their firms, regardless of their fault. A firm may stick with the attorney while they are being sued for malpractice but later fire them after the matter is concluded.

## 24. You Are Not Easy to Work With

Some attorneys are easier to work with than others. Associates, partners, and others may get the reputation for being difficult to work with. There are all sorts of associates and partners who may be considered difficult to work with. Here are some I have seen recently:

- **The screamer, belittler, and abusive attorney who frequently upsets others.**  
Partners, associates, and others may get a reputation for being extremely difficult to work with. When this occurs and goes on long enough, other people may no longer want to work with you. This will create all sorts of issues in the office, and many attorneys end up getting fired for this. In several instances, I have seen large groups of associates in law firms get together and tell management they refused to work with a given partner. It has often worked in forcing the partner to leave the firm. I have seen several associates fired for this sort of behavior towards subordinates in the past.
- **The associate who asks too many unnecessary questions and requires too much guidance and reassurance.**

Partners and other associates want to be able to give an assignment, and with the least amount of input possible, have the assignment come back well done and complete. Associates who ask too many questions about an assignment and get the reputation for requiring a lot of handholding will very quickly find themselves with less to do, or nothing to do at all. Associates are supposed to figure out the answers on their own and make sure they do not waste any more time than necessary of their superiors.

Having the reputation of being easy to work with also means that when you are given an assignment, it comes back complete and with as little modification or correction as possible. You are expected to research the hard questions, go the extra mile, and do what it takes to make the job as easy as possible for those you are working for.

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

- [Are You a Quality Product?](#)
- [Love Your Work and the People Who Give It to You](#)

## **25. You Are Unwilling to Go the Extra Mile**

Attorneys in all law firms (large and small) are expected to go the extra mile for clients, the firm, and others when necessary. The more you make your job about you and not your firm, or the firm's clients, the more likely you are to lose your job.

- This means that if you need to work an all-nighter (or two), you do.
- It means that if you are asked to complete an assignment on a tough deadline, you do.
- It means that if you are in the office at 8:00 pm and someone asks you to complete an important assignment, you get it done.
- It means that if you are in the middle of a vacation and something important comes up, you drop everything to get it done.
- It means that if a document needs to be reviewed, researched, or proofed, you get it done.

The difference between mediocrity and success is often no more than 3% or so. You need to give that extra 3% when you possibly can.

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The problem with not going the extra mile is that in most firms there are those who will if you do not. These are the people who will gain favor with the firm, who will get the most work, the most hours, and be least likely to ever lose their jobs. Practicing law is a profession that is similar to being a doctor. If a doctor does not go the extra mile, people can lose lives. In the legal profession, the attorney who does not go the extra mile can cost his or her clients cases, companies, trials, freedom, deals, and make other mistakes and errors than can have long-term consequences.

Attorneys lose jobs for not going the extra mile all the time.

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

- [The Two Most Important Ingredients of Success](#)
- [You Need to Pay the Cost](#)
- [Be Someone Who Is Engaged with Work, Not Someone Who Avoids Work](#)

## **26. You Have a Bad Attitude**

A bad attitude can mean many things. Attorneys want to give work to and work with other attorneys who have good attitudes. Lawyers lose jobs for bad attitudes all the time.

- The firm will pick up on your bad attitude and conclude you do not want to be there. Rather than tolerating your bad attitude, the law firm will likely simply let you go.
- Attorneys want to give work to people with good and not bad attitudes.
- Law firms believe that attorneys with bad attitudes infect those around them (which is often true). Rather than permitting you to infect their team, the law firms will instead let you go.

You may have a bad attitude about your compensation, your peers, the health of your firm, your practice area, being an attorney, your bosses, your hours, your assignments, your lack of free time, your personal life, and any other huge variety of things. Whether you are a partner or an associate, a poor attitude is not a good idea and almost never ends well.



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

- [The Power of Self-Awareness and Positive Thinking during Your Job Search](#)
- [Sick Crows, Your Attitude, and Being on the Winning Team](#)
- [A Message to Garcia and Your Career](#)

## **27. The Firm Does Not Like Your Work**

You may make too many careless errors, miss fundamental legal principles, be sloppy, be a poor writer—who knows. If the firm does not like your work and the partners in your firm do not, they will simply give work to others and (more likely than not) will let you go. Good firms do not have the time or the patience to rehabilitate attorneys who do poor quality work. The most important thing you can do if the law firm does not like your work is to do whatever is in your power to improve your work immediately and as quickly as you possibly can. You need to fix your work as quickly as you possibly can when your firm does not like it.

I see attorneys lose jobs for the quality of their work all the time. One attorney I was working with not too long ago told me that he was fired because his law firm did not like the quality of his work and was losing his job due to this.

“What are you going to do to fix this at your next firm?” I asked him.

“I intend to start making sure I rely on my secretary to proof my work, so I do not make so many errors,” he told me.

While the wrongness of this response should be obvious (I hope), the problem with this attorney was that he was putting the blame on others instead of himself. You need to fix what is wrong with you first before you rely on others. You should be able to turn in perfect work.

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

- [The Importance of High Standards in Your Life and Career: What High Standards Mean](#)
  - [Do Not Blame the System or Others: Accept Responsibility](#)
  - [Improve When Others Are Not](#)
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## 28. You Are in the Wrong Culture

If you are in the wrong culture, you may find that you lose your job for reasons that have nothing to do with you. Law firms hire different types of people, and you cannot be expected to be a fit for every law firm. While it may seem extremely unfair, you can lose your job in many law firms if you are in the wrong culture. The law firm may make it about something else (your hours, your performance, an inconsequential error), but it can happen.

I am not just talking about things like race or religion either. Certain law firms are made up of former athletes. Others may be composed of people who grew up in the same town. Others may be composed of libertarians and still others may be made up of attorneys who are socialists. You need to find your tribe and work with people who are like you and share your outlook. In high school, there were the jocks, nerds, and stoners. The same sort of logic applies to the law firm world as well.

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

- [Firm Culture Matters Most](#)
- [Why You Should Find Your “Tribe” and Not Just Focus on Money in Making Law Firm Job Decisions](#)

## 29. You Are on the Wrong Side of Office Politics

Office politics takes many forms. There may be a management shakeup, a dispute about a hire, or a fire. There are all sorts of political happenings inside of law firms that happen and which can determine your fate and get you fired. This is one that is quite interesting.

- [See Politics Not as Usual at the Law Firm for more information.](#)

## 30. You Are in a Branch Office

Branch offices are vulnerable parts of the law firm. While law firms will talk all day about how branch offices are “integral” to the overall firm and make similar pronouncements, not all are. While what I am discussing below are often true, there are some exceptions to these rules:

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- **Most important law firm decisions are made in the main offices of law firms, and the power of the law firm is typically in the main office.**

This means it is often much more difficult to make partner, advance, get close to people with lots of work, and stay busy in a branch office. This means you are more likely to lose your job in a branch office than the main office—not always, of course, but often.

- **While not always the case, branch offices of many law firms are not as profitable as the main office.**

This means that the law firm may be unwilling to support them for a long-term period. Branch offices are often closed if they get too burdensome for the law firm to support and are not profitable enough. Many law firms that open branch offices are also from major cities. They often are uncompetitive in new markets because they cannot charge the same billing rates as they do in their main market, which hurts their profits. This means that law firms are less tolerant of unproductive attorneys and may often cut them in branch offices.

- **Branch offices are often comprised more of lateral attorneys and attorneys who have fewer roots in the main office of the law firm.**

This means that the partners in these branch offices may be likely to cut people instead of keeping them around. The relationships are not as strong.

- **Groups of partners that leave a branch office are likely to leave major voids**

Groups of partners in branch offices often feel that they are not treated fairly by management, are under compensated, and all sorts of other issues that lead them to leave. When they leave, they often take their work with them, leaving vulnerable people without work and, consequently, jobs.

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

- [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?](#)
- [BCG Guide to Growth, Mergers, and Branch Offices](#)

### 31. You Make a Bad Mistake of Some Kind

Attorneys make mistakes all the time—some more serious than others. Whether the mistake is intentional or not, some mistakes cannot be taken back.

- Missing an important legal issue that loses a case.
- Forgetting to file an important legal document by a deadline.
- Missing an important issue in a deal.
- Showing up late to a closing.

I recently had a candidate get fired because he had been working 48 hours straight, went home to take a quick nap and shower, and overslept a closing by an hour and was late to the closing. Even though the client was not upset, the attorney still lost his job.

- **See [Top 5 Tips for Attorneys Who Make Mistakes](#) for more information.**

### 32. You Are in a Practice Area That Is No Longer Profitable

Law firms are cyclical, and you can lose your job depending on how well your practice area is doing.

During good economies, corporate law tends to dominate the majority of work inside of law firms. There is so much corporate work that this is the profit center. When corporate work is “hot,” this drives the profits of most law firms. In good economies, there also tends to be fewer lawsuits. Businesses and individuals are more prosperous and less likely to sue. They are more optimistic about the future. Corporate attorneys “rule the roost” and demand the most compensation, and litigators have less power inside of most law firms.

During bad economies, corporate work often comes to a complete standstill. Corporate attorneys get very, very slow and have no work. Businesses slow down and start looking for others to blame, and they try to figure out how they can recover money they may have lost in better times. They start filing and defending more lawsuits. Litigation picks up while corporate slows down. Litigators start having more power inside of law firms.

During high-interest-rate economies, real estate often gets very slow and unprofitable for law firms.

Labor and employment are practice areas where rates are pushed down, and it is more difficult for firms to charge high rates—large law firms often shy away from these practice areas.

- **See [Why Every Big Firm Practice Area Eventually “Self-Destructs” at Least Once Every Eight Years](#) for more information.**

## Conclusions

Attorneys lose jobs for the strangest reasons—some justified and others not. I would love to hear your stories about why you or someone you may know lost their position in a law firm.

### See the following articles for more information:

- [Legal Career Suicide: Quitting a Job without Having another One Lined Up](#)
- [No, You Should Not Quit Your Job before Securing a New One](#)
- [The Real Reason Why Most Attorneys’ Careers Are Out of Control](#)
- [Why Attorneys with 5+ Years of Law Firm Experience Are in Serious Trouble \(and Seven Steps They Need to Take to Save Their Legal Careers\)](#)
- [The 18 Most Important Decisions You Make with Your Legal Career](#)
- [The Right and Wrong Reasons to Switch Law Firms](#)