

# 23 Types of Attorneys Prestigious Law Firms Avoid Hiring

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

Harrison Barnes does a weekly free webinar with live Q&A each Wednesday at 10:00 am PST.

You can attend anonymously and ask questions about your career, this article, or any other legal career-related topics.

You can sign up for the weekly webinar here: [Register on Zoom](#)

You can browse a list of past webinars here: [Webinar Replays](#)

You can also listen to Harrison Barnes Podcasts here: [Attorney Career Advice Podcasts](#)

You can also read Harrison Barnes' articles and books here: [Harrison's Perspectives](#)

**Summary:** Find out how to hire the best lateral attorneys and the types of attorneys prestigious law firms avoid in this article.

**Lateral attorney hires can be difficult to place within a law firm.**

**They are particularly difficult if they have little to no law firm experience.**

**Law firms who seek out lateral hires see attorneys such as this as potential problems.**

**In fact, they often do not hire them from the auspices that these attorneys may have no interest in law in the first place.**

## A NOTE FROM HARRISON

I do not necessarily agree with how the most [prestigious law firms have traditionally hired attorneys](#). These rules have been in existence for decades and I did not make them--I am writing about them and what they are. The below piece discusses how most (not all) prestigious law firms make interviewing and hiring decisions. I care deeply about providing honest information to job seekers and not hiding the ball. You deserve to know how things work. I have made thousands of placements and understand these rules. I did not make these rules, however.

If you are interested in my opinions on the "rat race" and what makes attorneys happy and I believe is important, I recommend reading this article I wrote shortly after writing the article below: [Why You Might be Better Off Being an Average Attorney Than Trying to Be an Exceptional One](#)

You can also see my thoughts on diversity, people who do hiring in law firms, why law schools are not important in the long run, the importance of money, and more in the links below:

[Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Legal Recruiting Coordinators and Their Role in the Attorney and Law Student Hiring Process](#)

[10 Factors That Matter to Big Law Firms More Than Your Law School](#)

[Why Law School Grades Do Not Matter Forever: Law School Grades and Your Legal Career](#)

[Why Money Is the Dumbest Thing Any Attorney Should Focus on When Joining a Law Firm: How Attorneys Destroy their Happiness and Legal Careers by Focusing on Money](#)

[Book: Law Firm Diversity: How Race, Gender, Age, Social and Economic Divisions Impact the Hiring, Retention and Advancement of Law Firm Attorneys](#) (This is a 200-page book I wrote to assist law firms, diversity directors, and others to hire people from different backgrounds.)

## Introduction

"There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which

cannot fail to keep man in everlasting ignorance - That principle is contempt prior to investigation." - Herbert Spencer.

The best law firms are very demanding environments. [It is essential the firm hire lateral attorneys that take themselves and their work seriously](#). Also, each attorney must be motivated by the importance of the law firm's work and the clients the firm represents.

This article explains the 23 types of attorneys that prestigious law firms have traditionally avoided hiring. I did not make these rules, am not saying I agree with them, and am not saying I believe these are correct. I am passionate about telling attorneys how law firms work, even if this is not what people want to hear.

### **[Lateral attorneys with no law firm experience \(except a good judicial clerkship\).](#)**

If a [lateral attorney](#) is hired by a law firm and does not have any law firm experience, the odds are that their training and ways of thinking about approaching problems may not work in the law firm environment. This is not always the case, of course, but most attorneys without law firm experience do not do well inside of law firms when law firms try them out. I am not sure why this is.

**Please also refer to these articles:**

**[How Law Students Can Decide Whether or Not They Should Clerk for a Judge: Should You Do a Clerkship or Not?](#)**

**[How the "Invisible Hand" Operates in Law Firm Employment Decisions: The Top 12 Most Important Factors Firms Consider When Hiring \(and Firing\) Attorneys](#)**

It could be that [attorneys motivated to work in the government, public interest and other practice environments typically do not do as well in law firms because their initial](#) (career) decisions and motivation showed they were not interested in the law firm environment. I see this regularly. Recently I was working with a graduate of [Harvard Law School](#) who (1) never was a summer associate in a law firm (and had zero law firm experience) and (2) spent the first three years after law school in positions in government and public interest. Despite what I knew would be huge resistance from law firms, I took him on and started working with him. Ultimately, I got him a position with a prestigious, national law firm.

Once he got the position, he started questioning whether the firm was prestigious enough for a graduate of Harvard Law School. He started wondering whether or not there were enough Harvard [Law School graduates](#) in the law firm and was concerned about whether or not he would get the right experience and more. He then asked if he could expect to lateral from that firm to a more prestigious law firm after a year or two. I told him it was a miracle he had received an offer in the first place. He had no private sector or law firm experience at all. The attorney then asked all sorts of questions about hours, whether or not they represented "bad" companies and more. He was not a fit for the law firm environment, and I knew the firm would be better off without him.

Ultimately, this attorney let deadlines for accepting a job offer from the firm come and go and was not hired. This was unfortunate because he was very lucky to have received an [offer from](#) such a good firm and I am guessing he will never get an offer from such a prestigious law firm again. This attorney was not interested in working in a law firm. This attorney also--miraculously--did not receive any offers from law firms while he was at Harvard Law School. There was something wrong with him, his personality and his commitment to the practice of law firm law that law firms were picking up on.

Attorneys who are looking for positions inside of law firms without law firm experience most often do not have

law firm experience because they did not get positions inside of law firms when they were in law school or were not motivated enough to get these positions early in their careers. This is a sign that law firms (especially the largest ones) take extremely seriously and should: These attorneys were not motivated enough to get [law firm positions](#) early in their careers, and the odds are they will not be motivated enough to stay inside of law firms if they are offered positions. They may be experimenting.

**Visit the following related pages for more information:**

[How to Be a Successful Attorney](#)

[Why Law Firms Are Very Reluctant to Hire Unemployed Lateral Attorneys](#)

[Top Ten Reasons Why Older Attorneys Have a More Difficult Time Getting Law Firm Jobs](#)

[Attorneys not motivated by money](#)

The attorney not motivated by money is likely not to be the best fit for a law firm. To work the hours and put up with the sort of internal competition that is common inside of a law firm, an attorney needs to be interested in money--there is no other way. The law firm uses money as a carrot to motivate long hours and high performance. Money (and clients) is the motivator for a law firm making someone a partner and the attorney staying a partner. Law firms love it, for example, when attorneys get married, purchase homes and cars and so forth because this means that the attorney will be more and more dependent upon them for money.

The law is a business and functions based on an attorney's ability to generate money. If a law firm hopes to have long-term control over an attorney, the attorney must at least have some motivation to make money and more and more of it. The more the attorney desires money, the harder they will work, the more business they will generate and the more likely the attorney will succeed inside of the law firm.

The best attorneys are most often the most motivated by money. They often do not come out of backgrounds where their parents had a lot of money. Instead, these attorneys tend to come out of backgrounds where they did not have a lot of money, and the attorney wanted to be like people that had a lot of money. This is a not-so-subtle distinction, but keeping an attorney motivated and working hard often requires that they see money for something that many would argue it is not (the key to happiness and the reason for high achievement). These attorneys want to be something their parents were not. This is just the way it is. The law is a business and like all businesses, operates on the concept that higher profits and more money are a good thing.

There are exceptions to this, of course, and I have known many very good attorneys that were not motivated by money at all. As a general rule, though, the biggest and best law firms are very demanding environments. A law firm loses control over attorneys when they are not interested in working long hours and exposing themselves to the sort of stress that they experience inside of law firms if the attorney is not interested in money.

If a couple has children and if the non-attorney is the primary breadwinner (i.e., the attorney makes \$300,000 and year and the non-attorney earns \$2-million), the attorney rarely stays practicing very long and tends to drop out of the practice of law--especially when there are children in the equation. I see this example over and over again. Very few attorneys continue the practice of law when they lose the motivation to make money.

I recently heard a story of an attorney I used to practice law with that had his law firm with another attorney in downtown Los Angeles. He won a very large verdict and received tens of millions of dollars in the recovery. [When he received the fee, and the money had cleared, the first thing he did was quit the law firm. He was only doing the work for money.](#)

I once had an office next to a labor and employment attorney in my building. I had a case I wanted him to look over, and I walked down the hall to speak with him, and he told me that he had just won a \$25,000,000

verdict and was not interested in my case because he was done "dealing with all this bullshit" and was moving on.

If money does not motivate an attorney, they will often be happier teaching law, working for the government, or going [in-house](#) and in an environment that is less taxing for them. Law firms often can keep attorneys working and enthusiastic about their firms with the prospect of more and more money. If the attorney is not interested in this, then they often will not be a good fit for a law firm.

See the following articles for more information:

[What Yale Law School Teaches About How to Approach Your Legal Career That No Other Law School Does](#)

[The Top Reasons Why Money is the Dumbest Thing Any Attorney Should Focus on When Joining a Law Firm](#)

[25 Reasons Why Boutique Firms Are the Best Choice for Many Attorneys and Can Be Much Safer Than Larger Law Firms](#)

Here are my opinions on worrying about money:

[Why Money Is the Dumbest Thing Any Attorney Should Focus on When Joining a Law Firm: How Attorneys Destroy their Happiness and Legal Careers by Focusing on Money](#)

[Attorneys not motivated by prestige and what others think of them](#)

Most law firm attorneys--or at least the ones that last--are also motivated by prestige. Their prestige level motivates them, the prestige level of their current law firm, the prestige level of their clients, the prestige level of their peers and even the prestige level of the city they are living in. Either an attorney buys into this prestige business, or they do not. Prestige most often motivates the "lifers" and the ones who end up in large, prestigious firms and spend their careers there.

**Their prestige motivates the best law firm attorneys.**

Attorneys are very aware of their qualifications: Where they went to college, how they did in college, where they went to law school, how they did in law school, what honors they received in law school, where they have worked, and what titles they have had. All of these things are very important to most attorneys, and most law firm attorneys believe they are a "brand" of sorts and need to protect their prestige by only interviewing with certain firms, working with certain types of attorneys and being around certain types of attorneys.

When I speak with any attorney who has been practicing for a significant length of time--even those in their 80's--they often start volunteering all of their accomplishments, awards and other matters. Just look at the biographies they keep on their websites. Prestige is very important to attorneys. Like school children collecting extracurricular activities, grades and other rewards to impress others with them, or Boy Scouts collecting merit badges, attorneys are motivated by what others think of them and prestige. If they get a significant compliment from someone well known, they tend to remember it and talk about it.

If prestige does not motivate an attorney, they will likely not be the best hire for most law firms. The reason for this is simple: Law firms also use the carrot of prestige to get attorneys to work harder and harder. An attorney uninterested in the prestige of their job, accomplishments and so forth is someone not likely to thrive in a law firm environment where people are trying to accumulate honors and so forth constantly. The drive to get honors and prestige keeps attorneys motivated to do well.

**Attorneys are motivated by the prestige level of their current law firm.**

The best law firm attorneys take their prestige very seriously--and nowhere does prestige come more into play than the prestige level of the law firm the attorney is working at. This is one reason that law firms can extract so much work and motivation out of them. The largest law firms use their prestige to confer prestige on

the attorneys, and this serves to keep the attorneys working there motivated as well.

When I meet a lawyer working at a very prestigious law firm, they typically are very proud of this fact. They are aware that it is competitive to become an attorney in these sorts of firms and get a lot of their professional identity from it. Attorneys are motivated by prestige and how prestigious their law firm is.

With limited exceptions, if I call almost any partner or associate at a major law firm and tell them that a more prestigious law firm than their own is interested in them, the attorney will almost always agree to speak with that firm. [The opposite occurs if the law firm is less prestigious.](#) The motivation of prestige is important to attorneys--very important.

Law firms use their prestige to both attract and retain attorneys. [An attorney that does not buy into the idea of prestige is likely not to do well in a major law firm because it is prestige that keeps many attorneys going.](#)  
**Attorneys are motivated by the prestige of their firm's clients.**

Most attorneys are impressed when their firms represent large clients, represent famous people and so forth. The prestige level of their firm also carries over into the prestige level of the clients their firm is working on. Most attorneys are aware of whom their firm represents and get a sense of importance from working at a firm that is representing significant companies, groups, and people.

Most humans are tribal animals and lawyers are no different--but some are more tribal than others. As tribal people, the best law firm attorneys are cognizant of who their firm is representing.  
**Attorneys are motivated by the prestige of the matters they are working on.**

In addition to being motivated by the prestige level of the firm's clients, attorneys are also motivated by the prestige level of the matters that they are personally working on. You can tell how motivated an attorney is going to be based on the level of enthusiasm they have when talking about the matters they are working on. I have had conversations with attorney candidates (who I knew were excellent fits for law firms), where the attorneys spoke about the matters they were working on with so much interest and enthusiasm that they spoke about it for over an hour.

I recently interviewed an attorney for a legal recruiting position who was working for [Gibson Dunn](#). He spoke with so much enthusiasm about the work that he had done and was doing that I knew he would never be a good fit for doing legal recruiting.

**Attorneys are motivated by the prestige of their peers.**

Attorneys are motivated by the prestige of their peers--where their peers went to law school, where they have worked in the past and so forth. This motivation is very strong. Before interviewing with any law firm, attorneys will typically look up the attorneys they are going to be working with and get the low down on their qualifications. Attorneys take great pride in working with groups of highly qualified attorneys because they believe this too makes them prestigious.

**Attorneys are motivated by the prestige of the city they are working and living in.**

Attorneys take the prestige of the city they are working and living in very seriously. Many attorneys working in New York City, for example, would never consider working somewhere else. The same goes for attorneys in many other cities. Attorneys typically work much harder in cities like New York than they do in other major American cities. The law firms can get so much work out of these attorneys because prestige motivates them.

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

[Whether More Attorneys Consider Prestige or Salary More Important](#)

[Top 10 Reasons Attorneys Trained in Major New York City Law Firms Command the Most Respect](#)

## From the Market

### Firm Culture Matters Most

**Attorneys that distrust the business-facing aspect of the law firm.**

Many young attorneys out there distrust the business-facing aspect of the law firm. Much of this comes from indoctrination into ultra-liberal values that they receive in various colleges and law schools that give them the idea that business is bad and anything seeking to make money is also suspect and bad. This sort of ideology ends up hurting law firms because the attorneys that join them then begin questioning the ethics of doing certain assignments, the number of hours billed and so forth. Law firms need to be very suspect of hiring attorneys with anti-corporate type values because they can do their firms great harm.

Every year I encounter various attorneys who have lost jobs inside of major law firms for questioning the wisdom of doing various assignments, or who have accused attorneys in their firms of overbilling and so forth.

Last year I worked with a first-year attorney from a top 5 law school who lost his position because he made a big stink out of doing an assignment for young partners because he did not believe it was necessary. He then told other associates that he felt the young partner was just trying to drive up the bill. This was obviously none of his business and--true or not--his job was to do the assignment and not question the business aspects of the firm.

Attorneys who are suspect of the business justification for law firm operations always end up losing their jobs. At the interview stage, law firms need to do a good job weeding out the sort of attorneys that could later make issues when hired. Law firms exist and work to make as much profit as possible. The partners in them are motivated by increasing their profits, holding onto clients and making money consistently. Any attorney that threatens this should not be hired.

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

**[The Top Two Different Ways Law Firm Partners Are Compensated](#)**

**[Business Planning for Practice Groups](#)**

**[Why Attorneys Often Fail as Business People and Entrepreneurs](#)**

**Attorneys that do not feel the work the law firm is doing is important.**

As touched upon above, law firms need to hire attorneys that believe that the work the law firm is doing is important. If the attorney has other long-term objectives for their career and would rather be doing something else, they should not be hired. An attorney not motivated by the importance of a law firm's work, the people in the law firm and so forth, is not likely to be a good fit.

**See [Why the Best Actors and Attorneys Are Exactly Alike](#)**

**Entry-level and lateral attorneys with very poor law school performance.**

There are plenty of good attorneys out there who did poorly in law school. Nevertheless, these sorts of attorneys typically do not get jobs in large law firms. The reason that law school performance is so important is that to a great extent an attorney's law school performance is an indicator of (1) their level of motivation and (2) their aptitude for the law. Almost all law schools have "blind grading" (meaning the professors do not know whose exams they are grading). While professors and others may have some "bias" towards attorneys from different backgrounds, an attorney's grades are most often earned without the professor knowing who they are.

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

**[10 Factors That Matter to Big Law Firms More Than Your Law School](#)**

## Why Law School Grades Do Not Matter Forever: Law School Grades and Your Legal Career

### Law School Grades and Your Career

#### First-year associates looking for jobs before completing their first year of practice

Attorneys that lose their positions during their first year of practice, or are looking for a position before completing their first year of practice, are most often not going to be the best fits for law firms over the long term. If an attorney is interested in throwing in the towel and moving on this quickly, the odds are very good that they will reach the same conclusion in their next firm as well--and the next firm should not "bite" by being an experiment for the attorney.

While there are all sorts of exceptions to this rule, being a law firm attorney requires a commitment. Most first year associates looking for a new position will have a variety of complaints about their firm--and some of these may make sense. Nevertheless, this lack of early commitment means in most instances that the constitution of the attorney is such that they are not likely to succeed in most law firm environments when the going gets tough (and the going will almost always get tough).

One major problem with attorneys looking for positions before completing their first year of practice is that these attorneys typically are not trained yet and do not understand what they are doing. The young attorney needs to be capable of taking orders, being managed and having their work extensively criticized. If the attorney is not able to have their work criticized and be managed early in their career, this is likely to continue to their next firm as well. Law firms are better off avoiding these attorneys.

See the following articles for more information:

[How Can I Make a Move as a First-Year Associate without Ruining My Relationship with My Current Firm?](#)

[Survival Tips for the First-Year Associate](#)

[The 10-Step, "No Fail" Guide to Distinguishing Yourself as a First-Year Associate](#)

[Top 32 Reasons Attorneys Lose Their Jobs Inside of Law Firms](#)

[Attorneys interested in drastically smaller, or less prestigious law firms than they are currently working at](#)

If an attorney is interested in moving to a drastically smaller or less prestigious law firm than they are currently working at this is, more often than not, a bad sign. This means either that the attorney is (1) taking the first job they can get, or (2) so unhappy with the practice of law that they are trying something drastically different to make a change. Neither of these is a good thing.

If an attorney is taking the first job they can get this means that the attorney is in a bad position and making the change for a reason. They may have lost their current position or may be desperate for a job because larger, more prestigious law firms will not hire them for some reason. In any event, neither of these are good things for the law firm and not good for the smaller law firm. These are "danger signs" and reasons to avoid the attorney seeking to move to a smaller law firm--or at least prolong pulling the trigger and bringing them on board for some time.

The other danger and the most significant one is that the attorney will leave and go to a larger and more prestigious law firm the second the opportunity presents itself. Larger law firms pay much more money than smaller law firms in most cases, and there is a host of reasons most attorneys prefer them. Smaller law firms that hire attorneys from larger law firms often find that they leave--quickly--when the opportunity presents itself. This happens with astonishing regularity and for the smaller law firm is often not a good idea because it can create issues with morale, upset clients and is a needless investment of money, time and energy into the attorney that would be better placed into an attorney who would appreciate the role.

Finally, many large law firm attorneys are so unhappy with the practice of law that they are willing to try anything to see if they will be happier in another environment. While there are exceptions, most law firms are quite similar. All law firms require that attorneys bill hours and there are very few law firms that do not want attorneys to bill a lot of hours. If an attorney is experimenting and trying to see if a smaller law firm will be any different, the odds are very good that they will find that the smaller law firm is in fact no different at all--only it pays less and works on smaller matters. Once the attorney "tries out" the small law firm and understands this, they will almost always leave. This is not good for the small law firm, weakens morale, and wastes the small law firm's resources hiring, paying and trying to incorporate this attorney into their practice.

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

[20 Reasons Why There Are No Such Thing as "Lifestyle" Boutique Law Firms and Why Boutique Law Firms Can Be Much More Dangerous Than Larger Firms](#)

[Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Legal Recruiting Coordinators and Their Role in the Attorney and Law Student Hiring Process](#)

[10 Factors That Matter to Big Law Firms More Than Your Law School](#)

[Why Law Firms Are Very Reluctant to Hire Unemployed Lateral Attorneys](#)

[Top Ten Reasons Why Older Attorneys Have a More Difficult Time Getting Law Firm Jobs](#)

**Attorneys from third and fourth-tier law schools with average or below-average academic performance.**

If a law firm is recruiting from law schools that admit students with the lowest LSAT scores and the lowest grades or if a student does not at least do better than average there, they are likely to have problems in the most competitive law firms. Attorneys who do not do well in average-to-poor law schools are a bad bet.

The reason these attorneys are a bad bet is that the law firm is selling the quality of an attorney's mind in solving problems. Solving issues requires intelligence, but this also requires a high degree of motivation--both things that law school performance tests. If an attorney did not do well in an average-to-poorly regarded law school, the odds are that he will not do well in most law firms either.

**Attorneys who did poorly in college.**

Except for science and engineering majors (where low grades and strict grading curves are often the norms), attorneys who did poorly in college are often poor risks for lateral hiring.

College grades (like law school grades) often show the level of motivation for attorneys. The ability to do well in college is often a reflection of the future-attorney's desire to achieve. I have found over and over again that the best entry level and [lateral hires](#) are most often the attorneys with the very best performance in college. College shows how hard someone is willing to work for an extended period and how likely they are to get passionate about a given subject matter that they major in.

**See [Top 10 Reasons Most General Practice Firms Have No Idea How to Hire and Evaluate Patent Attorneys](#)**

**Entry-level attorneys who did not summer in a law firm.**

[Larger law firms typically use the summer associate programs as a "testing ground" for future hires.](#) They expect attorneys to summer in law firms because it shows a level of motivation to work in a law firm and the ability to get these jobs to begin with. If an attorney does not work for a law firm during their first and second year of law school and, instead, takes a position with a nonprofit, a public interest organization, or something along those lines, the odds are that the attorney is not interested in working in a law firm. Most attorneys without experience summering in a law firm do not stay long in law firms when they hire them--but this is not always the case.

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

## What Your Summers Say about You

### Worked as a Summer Associate But Didn't Get an Offer. Your Options?

### I Did Not Hold a Summer Position or Other Relevant Internship During My Law School. What Should I Do to Help My Job Search?

#### Attorneys that have been involved in lawsuits against previous employers.

If an attorney has been involved in lawsuits against a previous employer, this is often a bad sign and something that most law firms choose to avoid. While I am sure there are numerous, numerous lawsuits filed all the time that have substantial merit, many do not. Law firms are often wise to avoid people that are trouble because they will find themselves on the receiving end of trouble in the future. The very least that law firms should do before hiring someone who has been involved in lawsuits is investigate the circumstances surrounding these lawsuits.

#### Attorneys who have had too many jobs in the past (or switch jobs frequently).

If an attorney has had too many jobs in the past (or switches jobs frequently), this means that the attorney will likely do the same thing with their new employer. There are attorneys who settle in and make things work and those who do not. More importantly, many attorneys who are constantly moving between firms do so because they get into trouble or realize there is no upward path for them at their current law firms. Other reasons that attorneys typically move between firms on an ongoing basis include:

**Inability to get along with peers.** Many attorneys have issues with peers and these issues surface at each firm they go to. If an attorney cannot get along with their peers, they are often uncomfortable and want to go to a firm where they get along with others. Many attorneys move between firms and sour on each firm and the people in them before moving onto a [new firm](#).

**Does not have the business represented.** It is very common for partners to jump between firms for years representing that they have business they do not. A firm hires these attorneys, and their promised business does not materialize, and then they move to another firm and repeat the process.

**Poor supervisory abilities.** Some attorneys have very poor supervisory abilities and move between firms because their toxic approach to people they give work to does not go over well with their law firms.

**Issues with work quality.** Many attorneys have issues with their work quality and find themselves pushed out of firms due to the quality of their work. These attorneys get to new firms, and these firms may take the time to realize the full extent of these issues before letting them go, not giving them more (substantive) work, or asking them to look for another position.

**Inability to be trusted.** Some attorneys have issues with trust that can create problems inside of law firms. They may not be able to be trusted about their hours, or with client information, or other attorneys may not trust them.

**Substance abuse problems.** This is very common inside of law firms, and many attorneys lose their positions due to issues with substances. Attorneys may also leave their firms when others discover they have issues and stop trusting them with work, or their abuse becomes an issue which harms the reputation of the firm.

**Issues getting work from others.** Some attorneys may have problems getting work from others for various reasons. These reasons may include poor work quality, personality issues, or failure to aggressively seek out work. Law firms want attorneys who can "create work" and find work to do and not the other way around.

**Consistent billing irregularities.** If an attorney has irregularities with their billing, then they may be let go, or not given work. Many law firms do not trust the hours that some attorneys bill because they may be over inflated and the firm will stop giving them work. Other irregularities include not billing enough hours.

**Inconsistent face time in the office.** Many attorneys may not be seen in the office enough. Most law firms consider face time in the office something that is quite important and necessary, but not all do. If an attorney is not available to receive assignments and take feedback from other attorneys, this can create issues.

See the following articles for more information:

[Managers, Idea People and Workers](#)

## **The Four Types of Attorneys: The Finder, Minder, Binder and Grinder**

## **How Law Firms Choose to Interview and Hire Attorneys and Law Students: The Only Three Questions**

## **Law Firms Evaluate Applicants By**

## **The Top 5 Long-Term Benefits of Attorneys Remaining Employed With a Single Law Firm**

Regardless of the reason for the attorney hopping between firms, the most overriding idea is that what happened in the past is likely to repeat itself in the future. I very rarely see attorneys with a history of constantly switching firms stay long at their new law firms. These are always bad bets for law firms, and the law firm is better off hiring someone with a more stable employment history. In the world of law firm hiring, the past is the best predictor of what is likely to happen in the future.

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

**Attorneys that are currently unemployed.**

If an attorney is currently unemployed, this is a very, very bad sign. The legal profession expects the career of an attorney to be the most important thing in the world to them--especially those working inside of law firms. If the attorney is not currently working, this means either that (1) the attorney is not committed enough to their legal career to continue working no matter what, or (2) was fired or asked to leave their last law firm. Many otherwise excellent attorneys make the mistake of leaving their law firms without another job--and they may leave for valid reasons. Nevertheless, law firms cannot afford to take chances on attorneys who do this and are wise to avoid them.

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

**Legal Career Suicide: Quitting a Job without Having Another One Lined Up**

**The Five Reasons Law Firms and Legal Employers Do Not Hire You After an Interview**

**The Top 17 Reasons Law Firms Do Not Hire and Make Offers to Attorneys and Law Students: It's Not What You Think**

**Attorneys who do not seem to take their careers seriously.**

When a law firm is interviewing an attorney, the attorney will say various things, in their words and their resume, that indicate they do not take their careers all that seriously. While there are many ways a law firm can pick up on this, the "gist" of this is that the law firm wants to avoid attorneys that do not seem consistently motivated to practice law in the law firm environment. Law firms need to ask questions and probe the commitment level of the attorneys they are interviewing to see how committed they seem to be. They want people who are going to stick around and succeed over the long run.

**See The Number One Reason You Are Not Getting the Jobs You Want and May Be Unsatisfied in Your Legal Career**

**Attorneys that have failed to pass the bar multiple times.**

While many excellent and highly skilled attorneys fail to pass the bar, once an attorney has had issues with this more than a few times this is not a good sign. Unlike the LSAT, the bar exam is not a test of intelligence--it is a test of how hard you studied for the bar exam. If an attorney puts in a lot of time studying for the bar exam, this is a sign that they are committed and are likely to succeed in the practice of law. Any wavering of commitment is something that shows the attorney may not succeed in the practice of law because succeeding takes such high commitment.

**Senior attorneys without business--or strong potential to generate business.**

Many law firms have institutional clients that consistently feed them work and that they have no issues putting their senior attorneys on. However, other law firms may not have these sorts of clients in the wings for their more senior hires and bringing a senior attorney on board as an unproven prospect with the hope they will

generate business is risky. Hiring any senior attorney without business is risky because they (1) will compete for partner-level work with other partners, (2) will often become a cost center rather than a profit center and (3) are a lawsuit risk if the attorney does not succeed (age discrimination and other suits are common).

**See [Why Attorneys With 5+ Years of Law Firm Experience Are in Serious Trouble \(and Seven Steps They Need to Take to Save Their Legal Careers\)](#)**  
**Attorneys who do not connect with interviewers.**

If an attorney does not connect with interviewers, there is often a problem in the wings. Lawyers should be able to connect with interviewers because this is something they will need to do (1) with other lawyers in the firm if hired and (2) with clients of the firm. While there is nothing wrong with an attorney not being a social butterfly, it is important that they can connect with people in the firm and they should not just be hired because they are diverse. Attorneys need to connect with their interviewers.

**See the following articles for more information:**  
**[The #1 Thing You Need to Say in Legal Job Interviews to Get a Job](#)**  
**[The Art of Interviewing: Tips to Converting Interviews into Offers](#)**  
**[Lateral Interviewing Techniques](#)**  
**[Interviewing After a Long Time](#)**  
**[Big Law Firm Interview Tips and Law Firm Interview Preparation](#)**  
**Attorneys that do not seem that interested in the practice of law.**

The best hires are attorneys (and law students) that go into interviews and can then talk, enthusiastically, about the practice of law and their interest in it. If someone is going to sit down and spent 10+ hours a day doing something, they should be interested in it. The ability of law students and attorneys to talk with a certain level of enthusiasm about the practice of law is very important and something they should do.

**See the following articles for more information:**  
**[The Practice of Law: To Stay or Go](#)**  
**[What Causes Associates to Leave Law Firms?](#)**  
**[Don't Give Up! Why You Should Work with the Best Law Firm You Can as Long as You Can](#)**  
**[The Seven Deadly Burdens of Being a Law Firm Attorney: Rejected, Criticized, Never Enough, Marginalized, Lied to, Insecure and Cast Out](#)**  
**Attorneys coming from [in-house](#), or the government (the more experience there, the worse).**

**[Attorneys from different practice settings typically do not transition well into law firms.](#)** Some of the reasons for this are that (1) there are different expectations in law firms than in other practice settings (law firms compete with other law firms to do the best work, and this competition is not as prevalent in other practice settings, the hours tend to be more, the interpersonal connections between attorneys inside of law firms tend to be more competitive), (2) an attorney interested in another practice setting is not likely to stay long-term in a law firm and may not be working in a law firm for a reason, (3) law firms tend to be more "up or out" than other practice settings.

Have you gone [in-house](#)? How was the transition?

**See [Why Going In-House is Often the Worst Decision an Attorney Can Make](#)**  
**A law firm attorney relocating to their home market is a better hire than an attorney [switching law firms](#) within their existing market.**

Lateral attorneys that are relocating to their home markets are often very good hires. The reason for this is that they are "coming home" and likely to remain in their new market over the long term. The odds are often

better than not that the attorney is returning home for reasons that have nothing to do with their performance in the market that they are leaving. Attorneys who are relocating and returning home are also often coming from larger markets to smaller ones and therefore may have developed skills working on more sophisticated and larger matters, in more competitive and demanding law firms where they billed more hours and had their work critiqued more extensively. If an attorney is changing firms within their existing market, the odds are that there may be issues with the attorney's performance and his ability to get along with peers--the attorney may have also lost their position. Attorneys who relocate within existing markets are also apt to relocate again. Law firms need to be more careful with attorneys switching firms within their existing market than those who are not.

### **Attorneys with a sense of entitlement.**

These sorts of attorneys are often difficult to spot, but there are many attorneys in the market who have a sense of entitlement and do not do well in the law firm world. Particularly dangerous are graduates of [the best law schools](#) (Yale in particular). Other attorneys who are dangerous are those who appear more motivated by bonuses and short-term rewards than what they can expect through long-term commitment in a law firm. If an attorney has a sense of entitlement, they may expect to be given only certain types of assignments, for example, and will complain and make issues about a variety of things--many very trivial. The sense of entitlement knows no boundaries and attorneys with a sense of entitlement often create low morale in their firms.

A sense of entitlement often occurs among attorneys that believe they have "made it" by having gone to a good law school (or gotten experience in a good firm), or among attorneys who believe they are special because of certain aspects of their backgrounds. Many attorneys believe that once they have made a certain amount of money, they are entitled to make this amount (or more) in the future. ([Little do they realize that in many major law firms they are "front-loading" their compensation early in their careers--their early incomes are high compared to what they will make later.](#)) Other law firm attorneys do not have backgrounds that inculcate the sort of middle-class work ethic that the attorney will need to succeed. They may have become accustomed to having money, honors, or other awards handed to them. The attorney may not have seen parents work as hard as they will need to succeed in a law firm.

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

[Narcissistic Entitlement Syndrome among Attorneys: Why Narcissism Destroys Young Attorney Careers](#)

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

[Attorneys with a downward trend of moves on their resume.](#)

Most of the best hires law firms make tend to be attorneys who are moving up, improving, getting better and better, and not the other way around. If an attorney shows a series of downward moves (to smaller and less prestigious firms), this is not a good sign. An attorney who is improving and moving to better and better jobs is one who is going places. In contrast, an attorney with a downward trend on their resume is likely to move to a less prestigious law firm after they work at yours.

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

[Top 10 Ways Attorneys Can Move to a Better Law Firm and Get a Better Attorney Job](#)

[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](#)

[Top 32 Reasons Attorneys Lose Their Jobs Inside of Law Firms](#)

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

## **Conclusions**

These are the most common warning signs that law firms should avoid when hiring attorneys. The largest, most prestigious law firms tend to avoid these more than the least successful law firms.