

Are You a Bureaucrat Attorney or a Producer Attorney?

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Summary: Are you cut out to be a bureaucrat or a producer attorney? Find out the difference between the two and which is better for your legal career in this article.

What type attorney are you, a bureaucrat or a producer?

Attorneys who are producers bill many hours and bring in business to the firm.

Those who are bureaucrats are not part of a firm's billable structure. As long as their core tasks are being performed, they can do what they want.

No one questions the amount of work the bureaucrat produces.

In fact, most bureaucrats work hours that approach normalcy, unlike bureaucrat attorneys who bill their time.

Something every attorney will be faced with deciding at some point in their legal career is whether or not they want to be a producer or a bureaucrat. The roles of the bureaucrat are far different than those of producers. The largest law firms and companies are filled with legions of both; however, the average attorney will prefer to be a bureaucrat outside of a law firm. Both being a bureaucrat and a producer have their advantages and their disadvantages. You need to decide which side you are more comfortable with.

When an attorney is billing a lot of hours, bringing in a lot of business for the firm and creating excess profit for the people that they work for means they are being producers. When the attorney is doing things other than billing their time (working in-house, for the government, working in a law firm not billing time and doing other things), they are acting as bureaucrats.

Most attorneys start out as producers, and the most successful attorneys are almost always producers. The entire law firm system functions by having lots of producers around. An attorney that bills out at \$500 an hour and works 2,000 hours a year creates \$1,000,000 in revenue for their firm each year. If the attorney is paid \$250,000 for this work they have produced an additional \$750,000 a year in revenue for their law firm. This is a producer. Similarly, an attorney that brings in \$3,000,000 in business to their firm each year and is paid \$1,000,000 for the work they do and this business creates a surplus of \$2,000,000 each year. This attorney is a producer.

This is capitalism.

Karl Marx was the first to intelligently point out that capitalism is about creating the greatest surplus possible from the labor and work of others. The capitalist (law firm owner, equity owner of the law firm) desires to create the greatest possible excess profit from the labor of their attorneys that they can. They want to pay them the least they can for the greatest amount of work. If you work 3,000+ hours and receive the same salary as an attorney working 1,500 hours the law firm owners are happy because you have created excess profit. If you bring in \$3,000,000 in business and the law firm only needs to pay you \$500,000 the law firm owners are happy because you have created excess profit.

See the following articles for more information:

[Overhead Ratios of a Law Firm](#)

[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](#)

The law firm is one of the more brutal white collar jobs there is because the attorneys are very similar to the factory workers producing widgets in Marx's time. The only difference is that there is constant pressure on the workers in a law firm (the attorneys) to produce more (give more hours) for little, or no compensation, than there ever was in Marx's time.

I live not too far from a city called Camarillo in California. There are all sorts of farms there that utilize illegal laborers to pick strawberries, lettuce and other things grown on these farms. When you drive by the farms, you can often see hundreds of workers picking these crops.

"How are they paid?" I once asked a guy who does maintenance work for me while we were driving to a Home Depot near one of the farms one day.

He explained to me that they are paid for each bucket of strawberries they pick. The more they pick the more they are paid. Here, the capitalist will make money based on the surplus between how much they can sell the strawberries for compared to the cost of planting, watering and picking them. The capitalist has the desire to pay the worker as little as possible for picking strawberries--that is why they use illegal workers (the worker does not have any power). The worker has the desire to pick as many strawberries as they possibly can. If they are fast and efficient, they may make more money.

In the law firm world, the associate is generally paid a fixed salary and potentially a bonus for working as many hours as they are capable of working--they are not paid for each hour they work. In most cases, the bonus will be a fixed amount. Unlike the strawberry picker who is paid based on the number of strawberries that they pick, the attorney in a law firm may not be paid more for billing more hours. They are expected to produce as great a surplus of money (hours) as they can for little to no difference in their compensation. The law firm will profit to the extent that they have work available.

This is quite extraordinary. Unlike the strawberry picker, the salesman, or most other professions, the attorney is expected to work as many hours as they are capable of, for the same amount of compensation. In terms of capitalism, the attorney is an aberrant example. You could not, for example, expect a fast food worker, a teacher, or any number of other people in other professions to work around the clock for the same amount of compensation.

"How on Earth," a rational observer may ask, "can the law firm get away with this?"

The law firm can do this because of the way the law firm is structured and what they make the worker attorneys in the law firm believe. The workers believe that:

Those who work the hardest can be partners.

Those who work the hardest will keep their jobs.

Everyone else is working hard and you should too.

You are part of an elite group who is also working hard and you should too.

You will lose your job if you do not work extremely hard.

You will only be worthy of a good review and praise if you work extremely hard.

You will lose your current lifestyle if you do not throw yourself into your work.

These promises are held out to young attorneys, and the attorneys throw themselves into their jobs and exploitation based on their beliefs in these principles. Meanwhile, the attorney is most often being sold a "bill of goods" that may not necessarily be true. There is the potential for major rewards from their work, but this is something that they often do not receive. This form of capitalist exploitation is amazing. The attorney is part of a capitalist cycle that uses not just money, but the attorney's own mind against them.

The attorney is under constant and never-ending pressure to give more hours, for less money, than people in other professions. When work slows down or goes away, they can lose their jobs. The law firm always sends the message to its workers that the people who are most likely to be kept around are those who bill the most hours. They are enslaved by money, a belief system and a need for prestige that keeps them down.

See the following articles for more information:

[How to Easily Determine the Best Attorneys and Law Firms: The Five Prestige Levels of Attorneys and Law Firms](#)

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

Partners with large books of business are also enslaved by the same idea. A law firm will pay them as little as it can for their business. A law firm's ability to hold onto partners is often a function of how much they are willing to pay. Most partners end up at various points in their careers quite unhappy with their compensation. The law firm will pay them as little as they can for as much work and as little pay as possible.

The law firm can get away with this due to the following:

The partner relies on the brand of the firm for prestige for themselves.

The partner relies on the brand of the firm for the prestige of their clients.

The partner feels obligated to the people that they work for.

The partner realizes there are large transaction costs if they move.

Most partners are replaceable in the best law firms.

Partners risk losing their current lifestyle if they make too many problems at their current firms.

The partners and associates inside every law firm are the producers and the ones who are producing money. The billable hour that they charge for their work has a direct correlation to the amount of money that the firm brings in. The firm is selling units of time. The more time each of them ends up generating for the firm, the better off the firm is.

In contrast to the attorney selling units of time are others in the law firm (and the legal world) who are not. The performance of people who are not selling their time by the hour is tied not to the direct money they are generating, but how their performance is judged by those they work with and for--generally, the people in the firm that are generating money selling their time. Because they are not evaluated based on the amount of money that they generate, they become adept at other skills inside the firm. They become, in a word, part of the bureaucracy of the law firm.

Bureaucratic attorneys operate by a different set of rules than producers. A producer sits down and needs to produce units (hours) of work inside of a law firm for a client willing to pay for these hours. They must document what they did for each unit of time and these units of time must be approved by a more senior attorney or the client. Money flows to the attorney only to the extent that the client and law firm believes that they are worthy of (1) being given the responsibility of billing units of time and (2) that the firm is willing to pay them for that time.

See [The Four Types of Attorneys: The Finder, Minder, Binder and Grinder](#) for more information.

If you are a bureaucrat, you are not part of the billable hour structure. Attorneys often very much dislike the billable hour structure because it forces them to be accountable for every minute of the workday and their worth is judged by whether or not they contributed enough production each day. In contrast, the bureaucrat is not part of this. The production is running separately for them, and they are more responsible for making sure that the production is running smoothly than they are for producing anything that has direct, sellable value.

According to Max Weber, an organization that becomes bureaucratic typically has six defining features.

They are specialized and divided into discrete tasks along a division of labor. Work is done by people specialized in the sort of work they are doing. Accounting is done by people specialized in accounting; IT is done by people specialized in computers and so on.

There are hierarchical authority structures. Each level controls the level below. For example, you might have a Recruiting Director and an Assistant Recruiting Director and a Recruiting Assistant inside each law firm.

Management is done by rules. There are rules that are handed down by higher-ups that are expected to be followed by those below.

An "up-focused" or "in-focused" mission. If the mission is "up-focused" then the role of the bureaucracy is to serve whoever has empowered it (the government, clients, or others). If the mission is "in-focused" then the role is to serve the organization itself and the people within it (a law firm bureaucracy is typically in-focused because its goal is to serve the law firm and not the clients of the law firm).

Employment is done based on technical qualifications. People are hired based on their ability to do certain types of technical work.

There is impersonality and personal indifference. The idea is to treat everyone (customers and employees) equally and not be influenced by differences.

Inside of a law firm, you can see how the bureaucratic machinery runs.

The human resources department. They are responsible for making sure that the rules and procedures regarding employees are followed (making sure the producers and bureaucrats working inside the firm are happy, hiring and other tasks). There are different levels of human resources. People are hired for their expertise in human resources. The human resources support the firm. They create manuals for how the human resources department should run.

The accounting department. They are responsible for making sure that the rules and procedures regarding money are followed (money that is received is accounted for and distributed). They are hired based on their accounting background and support the firm. There may be a Chief Financial Officer of the firm and several people below them (staff accountant, book keeper, payroll specialist and so forth).

The marketing department. They are responsible for making sure that the rules and procedures regarding how the firm promotes itself are followed (brochures are written and distributed, events are held, the website is updated with information). They support the firm. There may be a Chief Marketing Officer and several people below them (marketing coordinator and so forth).

The IT department. They are responsible for making sure that the rules and procedures regarding the computer systems are followed (software is installed, computers are running, phones are working). They support the firm. There may be a Chief Technology Officer and several people below them (system administrator, for example).

The legal department. The (internal) legal department of the law firm is responsible for making sure that the rules and procedures regarding how the law firm is running are being followed (making sure that the firm defends lawsuits against it and does not get into legal trouble). There may be a General Counsel and other attorneys who work with the General Counsel.

In each of these cases, the people within the bureaucratic organization are not measured based on what they produce each hour. They can speak to each other, talk about rules and procedures and interact with the outside world and--as long as their core tasks are being performed--no one will question the amount of work they do and they will not be responsible for recording each minute of time they work. Moreover, most bureaucrats can work hours that approach more of a sense of normalcy than they would as attorneys billing their time.

There is also a rule of bureaucracy called "Parkinson's Law." First articulated in a 1955 article in the Economist by Cyril Northridge Parkinson, the article discussed the increase in the number of people working in the British Colonial Office (which administered Britain's colonies), despite the fact that the number of overseas colonies was decreasing. According to Parkinson, growth occurs because (1) "An official wants to

multiply subordinates, not rivals" and (2) "Officials make work for each other." Parkinson found that the number employed in a [bureaucracy](#) rose by 5-7% per year "irrespective of any variation in the amount of work (if any) to be done."

Essentially, what Parkinson's Law means is that in the bureaucratic organization there is a tendency for the bureaucrats to encourage more and more hiring. They want to hire more people to help them with the work--even if they do not need the help. A lot of hiring is done based on hiring friends and others. The tendency and momentum of the bureaucratic organization is to try to influence those in power to give them less work instead of more. In the largest law firms, you see a rapid increase of the bureaucracy inside the law firm and it seems to increase year after year. I am amazed at how bureaucratic some of the largest law firms have become. You also see this inside of corporations.

When attorneys speak about "going in-house" and "getting out of law firms" what they are often saying is that they would prefer to be bureaucrats rather than producers. They often want to be in roles where their experience is not measured directly and where they can blend in.

See the following articles for more information:

[Why Going In-house Is Often the Worst Decision a Good Attorney Can Ever Make](#)

[The 'Dark Side' of Going In-house](#)

[A View from the Other Side: My Life as an In-House Attorney](#)

[Going In-house? Why You May Be Saying Goodbye to Law Firms for Good](#)

There are advantages and disadvantages to being a bureaucrat compared to being a producer. This is a decision that many attorneys will be confronted with at some point during their careers.

The Advantages of Being a Bureaucrat (Nonproducer)

The value and individual productivity of a bureaucrat is not always capable of being measured directly.

The bureaucrat's work is not tied to the billable hour. Because of this, no one can sit down and see how many hours the bureaucrat has billed each day, week, month and year. The bureaucrat is expected to show up and do their work. Because production is happening elsewhere in the organization, a bureaucrat can often get away with doing nothing at all, or not fully applying themselves to their tasks. They can take more time to do tasks often without getting their "hours cut" by a partner or a client. This means that the bureaucrat may have more freedom with their time, how focused they are and can often get away with doing next to nothing.

Bureaucracy is often epitomized by the government. I spent a summer in the Department of Justice when I was in law school. People did not arrive to work until 10:00 am, took a one to two-hour lunch around 12:30 to at least 2:00 most days and left at 5:00. By 5:30 the entire office building I was in (that took up over a city block) was generally abandoned. This would be unheard of for a producer inside of most law firms.

See [The Importance of Productivity, Focus, and Measurement](#) for more information.

The bureaucrat is often just responsible for the work given to them and does not need to go looking for work.

The bureaucrat also does not need to get work from multiple clients like an attorney does (partners or clients of the law firm). They are just responsible for doing the work given to them. It is assumed that the bureaucrat always has work by most producers. If the bureaucrat does not have work, they are not always responsible for looking for it and can wait until more work comes down from the organization or from producers. While most bureaucrats may go looking for work when it gets slow, they do not always do this. They need to do the work they are given well, but liberated from the billable hour they are not measured by how much they work.

The benefit of being an attorney bureaucrat is that they do not need to go looking for work outside of the company--the work is right there for them to do. In contrast, the future of most attorneys inside of law firms is

based on their ability to bring in outside work and get clients. The bureaucrat has the advantage of not being under pressure to bring in outside work like this.

See [Time Economy Jobs and Productivity Economy Jobs](#) for more information.

A bureaucrat can stay employed longer if they constantly look busy.

In a recession when the law firm gets slow, the bureaucrat will often "look alive" and suddenly act like they and their department are busy, but in general, the tendency is towards doing less work than more. A bureaucrat will often try to avoid getting more work. The bureaucrat needs to look indispensable to the law firm and will try to look like they have lots of work rather than less. If producers and bureaucratic supervisors believe they are extremely busy, the last thing they will want is to have to do this work themselves. They will make sure the bureaucrat stays employed to save themselves the extra work.

Attorneys working inside of companies become experts in finding "urgent" work that needs to be done to avert catastrophe. They can point out how the company is not in compliance with this or that, risking exposure to some legal issue and more. All the attorney needs to be able to do is look like they are constantly putting out fires and explain how they are doing this to higher-ups and they are almost always going to be fine.

See [Good Things Only Happen When You Are Moving](#) for more information.

A bureaucrat that gets closest to the best producers and higher ranked bureaucrats can often stay employed.

Because most bureaucrats are not measured based on their production of billable hours, they are often dependent upon the good graces of just a few people to keep their jobs. They make sure they do the best work possible for these people. They may also flatter them, make them feel important and so forth to be liked by these people. As long as those that hold their employment in their hands like them, the bureaucrat is often safe regardless of the value of their other contributions to the enterprise.

In the in-house world, the best bureaucratic attorneys become experts in ingratiating themselves to CEOs and other high-ranking officials inside of the company. They can tell these executives the sorts of things they want to hear and make sure that they are in their favor at all times. This sort of skill means that they not only protect their jobs but often move with the C-level executives when they move companies.

See [Getting Referrals from Powerful People \(We All Know Someone\)](#) for more information.

A bureaucrat with the best qualifications can get hired based on these qualifications and stay employed based on them.

Often bureaucrats are hired for the strength of their qualifications. They may be hired because they have good technical skills, went to good schools, have connections, or worked for a prestigious employer previously. These sorts of qualifications may give the bureaucrat "technical competence" in the eyes of the employer. This is often enough to get a job and stay employed by the employer. If the bureaucrat has the advantage of being in a competency that the employer does not understand (the IT department in a law firm is a perfect example) the bureaucrat with the best qualifications may be hired and continued to be employed based on the belief that they know what they are doing, are doing the job well and should be left alone.

In the law firm environment, a law firm will like it if an attorney went to [Harvard Law School](#), but unless that attorney bills a lot of hours, or brings in substantial business, their upward mobility will be limited to a great extent. If they go in-house, or to another sort of position, they may be able to rest on their laurels more than their productivity to the firm. This is, in fact, what many end up doing from prestigious law schools and it works.

See the following articles for more information about how much law school matters to producer attorneys:

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

How Much Does the Law School You Went to Matter When You Lateral Firms?

A bureaucrat can get promotions based on people above them leaving or getting better jobs in the organization.

An attorney makes partner most often based on their hours, or individual contribution of business to the law firm. In contrast, the bureaucrat may find themselves advanced up the chain when people are leaving the firm, or getting better jobs in the law firm. The assistant head of human resources may suddenly find they are the head of human resources when someone leaves. While the technical competence of the bureaucrat is often a factor in their advancement, it may have more to do with circumstances and time, rather than their individual productivity.

For in-house counsel, the same logic applies. An attorney can often rise to become General Counsel based on the existing General Counsel leaving. In a law firm, this sort of promotion would typically require actual monetary contribution through high productivity: Either substantial business or substantial hours.

See the following articles for more information:

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

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

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

A bureaucrat is often safe as long as they are following rules and may even be protected by rules.

The job of a bureaucrat is most often prescribed by various rules they are expected to follow to do their jobs. The bureaucrat may be expected to perform their tasks according to certain guidelines. As long as they do this they are presumed to be doing a good job. When rules are involved, they can point to criticism of their work and state that they were just following the rules and often be okay. Bureaucrats often love rules because by following them they are safe and presumed to be technically competent and their jobs are safe.

In a law firm, if someone wants to fire you it is often not too difficult to do so. In most companies, there may be all sorts of procedures and processes for doing so. Incredibly, you might be protected from being fired by a union, a hearing may be required and all sorts of other processes might need to be followed. There are even companies where attorneys are protected by these sorts of rules. Because bureaucratic attorneys are protected by these rules, they have much more employment security than they would have in traditional jobs.

See [The One Simple Rule for Succeeding in a Law Firm](#) for more information.

A bureaucrat with good social and political skills can often stay employed for a long period of time.

If a bureaucrat is liked not just by producers, but other bureaucrats within the organization they often have a great deal of power. If lots of others like the bureaucrat then they have political power within the organization, because to fire that particular bureaucrat could cause a lot of unrest in the organization. In addition, many bureaucrats are hired for their "connections" outside of the organization and the presumption that these connections will help the overall organization. Because of this, many bureaucrats become very adept at being political inside of the organization and building up goodwill among others. The presumed connections outside of the organization may also make the higher-ups in the organization believe that treating the bureaucrat well should be a priority and upsetting them should be avoided lest the organization is hurt by outside forces.

The political skills are one of the most defining characteristics of the best bureaucrats. They often become experts in politics rather than the actual work they are doing. They learn to use information selectively and to empower themselves and others. They become adept at taking down opponents. The bureaucrat learns how to drive wedges between people and bring others together. The longer someone is a bureaucrat the more

they tend to learn this sort of work and become an expert in it. Many of the problems with large organizations (and their downfall) can often be blamed on bureaucrats fighting among themselves and creating various issues.

Attorneys with good social skills often do well inside of in-house roles. One reason for this is that they can work closely with executives and get in their favor. They are also able to create goodwill among outside counsel and others towards the company and be thought of highly for this as well.

See the following articles for more information:

[Your Job Is a Game-Make Your Opponents External](#)

[Do Not Get Involved in the Social Side of the Office](#)

If they are with a large, growing organization, they may have an easy time surviving.

The larger the organization, the more bureaucrats it typically has. Once an organization becomes large enough, it will often become more and more inefficient with various levels of bureaucracy that become more and more specialized. As the bureaucracy grows, the size of the organization (and the money it is generating) often follows. The money inside of the organization allows for increasing inefficiency within the bureaucracy. Realizing there is a lot of money flowing into the organization, the bureaucrats will try and reduce the work that they have to do by hiring more and more people to help them with their work. This process is never-ending. The more successful the organization, the more people the law firm will hire in its bureaucracy.

An attorney inside of a major organization may have an easy time surviving because the company may view the expense of its legal department to be completely insignificant compared to the amount of money they are generating. Large, inefficient organizations may not watch their expenses very closely. This is especially so when they are growing or their stock price is increasing.

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

The bureaucrat often is doing work for producers that do not understand what the bureaucrat does, and this gives the bureaucrat added employment security.

Because the bureaucrat is a specialist, they are often doing work that the producers do not understand. For example, a company may hire an in-house counsel to assist it with various legal issues. Since the company does not understand these issues, they have to take the attorney's word for it when they explain them. In addition, if the attorney tells them that they are working "very hard" researching a legal issue and need extra time the company will need to trust them that this work is necessary. After all, the bosses may not understand anything about the law and will believe that all of this research and extra work is necessary--even if it is not. An advantage of being a specialist bureaucrat is that your job is to tell people who do not understand what you do what sort of work is necessary. You are in control of what does and does not get done and have a surprising amount of control over your time due to this.

See the following articles for more information:

[Do Not Allow Others to Be in Control of Your Career and Life](#)

[Control Your Environment](#)

[Your Strength Is Your Ability to Control Your Internal World](#)

The Disadvantages of Being a Bureaucrat Attorney (Nonproducer)

They are a cost center and not a profit center.

Because a bureaucrat is a cost center, there are dangers associated with their job that would not exist were they not a cost center. If an attorney is billing a lot of hours or has a lot of business, there is very good

presumption that their jobs are quite safe and they have nothing to worry about. An attorney is almost always safe in their jobs if they are generating enough money for their firm.

If an attorney is a cost center, this means that when things get slow, or there are budget cuts, people will look to eliminate people that are costing money and not bringing in money. Legal departments are often the victims of cutbacks during recessions, or when companies, governments, or other legal employers are experiencing various issues. If you are a bureaucrat, you, therefore, are at the mercy of forces outside of your control at all times. In contrast, people that are not bureaucrats and producers are in control of their futures. **See [How to Beat the System and Stop Being a Profit-Driven Workaholic Attorney](#) for more information.** **If they are not political or do not have good political skills they may have a difficult time surviving.**

If you are a bureaucrat, you need people to like you to survive in most instances. You are valued for the quality of your work, but you are also valued for how smoothly the organization is presumed to function with you there--and this is a function of how much people like you, how well you can get people to agree with you, and your effectiveness at politics in general.

Because your value to your employer is not tied to your individual economic contribution, the politics of the employer can work for or against you. If people do not like you, they can find inconsequential reasons to disvalue your performance or to let you go. The politics of the employer can very quickly take you out of the picture.

See [You Need to Be in Favor with the Right People](#) for more information.

No matter how hard they work, they may not be able to increase their income or position substantially.

The benefit of working as a bureaucrat is often the fact that it is presumed to offer a certain level of stability. As long as the bureaucrat shows up to work and does their job, they can receive a certain salary, benefits and be secure. Nevertheless, no matter how talented or hard working the bureaucrat is they may find themselves "stuck" and unable to make substantial progress in advancing in their jobs.

In a law firm, if you are able to produce and deliver a certain amount of income to the firm your income will advance. While the price for this is less stability, people that are hardworking and can deliver business to the law firm like this a great deal. These sorts of people would feel miserable and very bored by doing a position where there was no constant pressure to improve, produce more and deliver business to survive.

See the following articles for more information:

[Never Stop Improving](#)

[You Must Produce and Do Quality Work](#)

Their individual creativity and abilities are often stifled by rules and behavior they are expected to follow.

Most bureaucratic organizations have certain rules and behavior that their members are expected to follow. Communication is expected to be along certain lines. There are lots of processes and procedures for doing various types of work. Sign-off is needed from higher-ups before doing various things. People need to report to the office by a certain time each day and cannot leave before that time.

Many attorneys feel limited by these sorts of rules and do not like them. If an attorney finds the rules of a law firm stifling, they may find the rules of a company even more stifling and limiting.

See the following articles for more information:

[Four Union-Like Rules of All Law Firms You Need to Know About](#)

[Five Class-Based Rules That Determine Attorney Success or Failure](#)

Their promotion is often limited by the mere existence of people above them.

In a law firm, people can often advance once they get enough business, or bill a ton of hours. In a company, the promotion of an attorney can only occur if the attorney above them leaves or is fired. Attorneys interested in constant achievement and doing well often find these sorts of limits on their advancement very limiting and constraining. They do not like not feeling in control of their destiny and want to believe that their individual hard work and other contributions will assist in this.

See [The Real Reason Why Most Attorneys' Careers Are Out of Control](#) for more information.

They need to look busy even if they are not.

Survival inside of a company is often based on looking busy, even if you are not. If you are not busy and there is no work to do, this means that your position might not be needed. Not looking busy also makes your superiors look bad because this means they do not have enough work either. Therefore, inside of companies many bureaucrats become experts in looking like they have a lot of work and are busy even when they are not.

While not having a lot of work to do may sound enjoyable to some, it is not something that a high-achieving attorney is often that enthusiastic about. More disconcerting is that they may need to have a lot of work available even when they do not--something that may border on the humiliating for the attorney. An attorney may prefer being in a situation where their work and productivity is measured against others in the firm instead of being part of a group where everyone is trying to look busy to please a higher authority.

See [To Succeed in Any Job You Need to Create Work](#) for more information.

If an important producer (or bureaucrat) does not like them (even for something non-consequential) then they can lose their jobs or be held back from promotions.

In a law firm, if the attorney is productive and generating substantial revenue for the firm they are in the driver's seat most of the time. In a company, the attorney is rarely in the driver's seat. The law firm is reluctant to let its most important producers go because they create most of the value.

If someone important decides they do not like the attorney inside of a company, they can very quickly decide to simply let the person go based on that alone. Who knows why this may happen. It could happen because someone believes the attorney is a threat, or simply because they remind them of someone they do not like. There are all sorts of reasons that people inside of legal departments can upset others, and they are so numerous it is hard to even think of them all.

See [The Top Five Ways to Be Positive \(When Everyone and Everything around You Is Bringing You Down\)](#) for more information.

Bureaucrats can lose their jobs (and reputation) for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Bureaucrats can lose their jobs just by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. If the company experiences some outside issue, it will often grapple around for people to blame and fire those it seems easiest to lay blame on. Even if nothing bad has happened, people can lose their jobs as well. If your supervisor is not liked by some higher-ups and you were known to be friendly with them, you might also be let go because it will be presumed that you are loyal to them and will be a problem (or harbor negativity) if you are kept around as well.

It can also happen to people in a legal department who did nothing wrong but found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. [When companies have products recalled from the market, or when some other catastrophe befalls them](#), they often let their entire legal departments go that had any remote connection with the problem--even people inside the department that may not have even known about the issue. If the General Counsel of a company is let go, the people under them may be as well. This is because when a new General Counsel comes in and hires people to work with that are friendly to her she does not want to work

with people friendly to her predecessor.

See the following articles for more information:

[Top 9 Reasons Attorneys Lose Law Firm Jobs](#)

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

If they are with a small, efficient organization, they may have a difficult time surviving.

Being a bureaucrat in a small, efficient organization is far more difficult than working in a large organization where you can get lost in (and be protected by) the layers of management. In small, efficient organizations everyone is expected to carry their weight and do the best job possible. People may be let go if they are not productive or working extra hard. The demands are typically greater on someone's time in a small, efficient organization than they are in larger ones.

See the following articles for more information:

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

[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 Law Firms](#)

Conclusions

Some attorneys are cut out to be bureaucrats and nonproducers and others are cut out to be producers. While it may appear that being a bureaucrat is not as much work, in reality it may look like a minefield to a producer and something to be avoided completely. This explains a great deal of the reasons why so many prefer to remain in law firms, work long hours and stick it out when others leave for supposedly greener pastures elsewhere.

See the following articles for more information:

[Top 15 Ways Attorneys Make Huge Career Mistakes Due to Information Blindness](#)

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

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

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

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