

Why Law Firms Are Very Reluctant to Hire Unemployed Lateral Attorneys

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

Summary: Discover the top 10 reasons law firms are often reluctant to hire unemployed lateral attorneys in this article.

If you are looking for an attorney position with a law firm when you are unemployed, you have an uphill battle. In the largest and most sophisticated markets, it can be nearly impossible to find a new position if you are unemployed. There are several reasons that law firms do not like to consider unemployed candidates for the openings they have. It is important that you understand why law firms tend to aggressively avoid unemployed attorneys. You are no different than someone who has been thrown out of a primitive tribe of your ancestors thousands of years ago. You are completely alone and have no one to defend or support you. Thrown out, you are considered an untouchable by many firms. The primitive instincts--in which others want nothing to do with you because someone else does not--take hold.

At the outset, I want to be clear that none of this may be pleasant to read--but you need to understand these reasons if you are going to beat them. You need to know what to say and how to address each of these criticisms.

They Believe You Were Fired--Why Else Would You Choose to Be Unemployed?

If you are not currently working, most law firms that see your application will presume you were fired. They will not be too interested in explanations about why you are not working and will quickly reach this conclusion--regardless of what you say in your cover letter.

If they believe you were fired, most law firms will not be interested in you because they will be under the impression that one of the following occurred in your last job.

You did something really bad.

Attorneys get fired for doing bad things all the time. I speak with attorneys in this position each week. Some recent ones I have heard about are

- (1) lying about hours (padding hours),
- (2) lying about expense accounts and stealing from the firm (an attorney making \$400,000 a year was fired for lying about a \$280 expense),
- (3) sexual-harassment-related issues--I've spoken to two attorneys who had issues with this in the past few months,
- (4) posting inappropriate content on social media,
- (5) not showing up for an important closing,
- (6) being suspected of sharing client business secrets with a relative who traded on them, and my favorite,
- (7) a patent litigation attorney in the Bay Area who was found to be working as an executive at a major tech company, making a very good living, at the same time he was working full time in a major American law firm. To maintain this craziness (and facetime at his second job) he told the firm he needed to work at home two days a week to take his wife to the doctor. You name it. Attorneys get fired all the time and often for stupid stuff--but it happens.

If you do something really bad, law firms assume that you will do something bad there as well and will want

absolutely nothing to do with you.

Your work was not good enough, and you were not adding enough value.

Some attorneys do not do quality work. They are sloppy, overlook stuff and make stupid mistakes. Their lousy work may be episodic and not happen often--or it may be a long-term pattern. Regardless, law firms let associates and even partners go all the time for not doing work that is up to par. The largest law firms have very high-paying clients who expect the highest quality work. If a law firm does not feel your work is up to par, they will often fire you.

If a new law firm thinks there are likely to be issues with your performance, they will not want anything to do with you either. Law firms do not want to hire the rotten apples and poor performers from other law firms.

See the following articles for more information:

[Add Value at Every Turn](#)

[The Importance of Creating and Maintaining Value](#)

You were unable to get enough work from other attorneys in the firm.

One of the most common reasons law firms fire people is because their hours are low. While they occasionally fire attorneys with high hours (especially those who are senior), [most attorneys are let go when their hours get too low](#). Therefore, there is a presumption that you may have been let go for low hours.

Attorneys are expected to network with other attorneys in their firms to get work. This is successful and works when attorneys network successfully and also do good work. Networking shows (1) your ability to get work from other attorneys, (2) indicates that you have a lot of potential to get work from clients in the open market (which benefits the firm), and (3) shows that you can get "repeat business" from other attorneys in the firm. The most successful attorneys in every law firm can get a lot of work from others--regardless of their practice area.

Other law firms will assume that if you did not get work from other attorneys--and did not keep your hours up--there was something wrong with your ability to network, and repeatedly get work from other attorneys.

If you are senior, you did not show potential to generate significant business for the firm in the future.

If you are a senior associate and get fired, other law firms will assume that you were let go because you did not show the potential to generate significant business for the firm in the future. When hiring senior attorneys, law firms are interested in attorneys who show the most potential to generate work for other attorneys as well as themselves. Hiring someone who is senior and needs a large income to support themselves but does not bring in their own business is not in a firm's best interest.

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

You had an attitude problem.

Many attorneys have attitude problems. They may not be happy with their superiors, the law firm environment, the amount of work, the type of work they are being asked to do, their fellow associates, their compensation--who knows. Lots of attorneys are unhappy at work, and their dissatisfaction is something that is not welcome in large law firms. People with bad attitudes bring their fellow attorneys down, affect productivity, decrease the ability of law firms to manage other attorneys, can impact client relations, are not fun to work with and often do poor, uninspired work.

If you have a bad attitude, most law firms would prefer you work elsewhere. They want to offer pleasant places to work and want people who bring others up and not down.

Law firms do not want to hire people they suspect have bad attitudes. In fact, law firms often fire people they believe have bad attitudes. Thus, law firms often surmise you were let go for having a bad attitude if you are not working.

See [Sick Crows, Your Attitude, and Being on the Winning Team](#) for more information.

You were not as good as your peers--who were not fired.

When law firms let attorneys go--and lay off groups of attorneys--they rarely let everyone go. Instead, they let go the attorneys they perceive to be the least valuable to the "tribe." This could mean you do not have the hours, the legal skills, the right attitude, or the networking skills--or something else. Regardless, the attorneys who are let go are the ones who are not considered as desirable as their peers (for whatever reason).

A new law firm does not want to hire another law firm's "undesirables." Instead, they want to hire someone that was the one a law firm would want to keep around.

You are not a cultural fit for your law firm.

Regardless of where you end up, you are expected to fit in. If you look at fraternity class pictures from the 1960s, the people look different than they did in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Why is that? There are different ways of fitting in and being normal at different points in time in every group. When people are part of a group, they often look and act quite similarly. Law firms have different cultures. What is expected and normal at one firm will be different at another. You are expected to fit in with the culture of every law firm you join. If you do not fit in with this culture, you may lose your job. Attorneys are expected to fit in wherever they go. Law firms call their partners "partners" for a reason--in addition to sharing income and expenses, partners historically tend to share work styles and even styles of speech and mannerisms in many firms. Partners, associates, and others do this with one another because that is part of fitting in.

See [Firm Culture Matters Most](#) for more information.

Your superiors did not believe you were a good fit for working in any law firm.

Many times an attorney is simply let go because they do not seem to be a good fit. It could be your work style, the fact that you ask too many questions of superiors and are difficult to give work to or, simply, that the law firm could tell you would not be a good long-term fit for a law firm. There are lots of attorneys who should not be inside of law firms. Attorneys who are too outgoing and people-oriented, attorneys who are very entrepreneurial, attorneys who have a ton of outside interests--many of these personality types have issues inside of law firms and do not belong there.

While instances like this are hard to put your finger on, the main issue is that there are certain types of people that do not belong in law firms. There are a million things I could point to, but if you appear uncomfortable and out of place in a law firm environment and it does not work, law firms will pick up on this and let you go.

See the following articles for more information:

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

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

While forming all sorts of opinions about the above issues, law firms will also believe you were fired if you are not working because they will surmise:

You have expenses you need to pay and would never leave voluntarily. For most attorneys, the idea that you would knowingly choose not to work would be insane. If you are in a major city, you have expensive rent, student loans, and other obligations. If you are a partner, you presumably have a house, car, maybe children and other people to support (including a significant other). No one in their right mind would knowingly choose to put themselves in a position where they could not pay for all of these expenses coming down the pike each day.

If you do not have expenses to pay, you are rich and a bad fit for a law firm because you will never put

up with the abuse they dole out and should not be hired for that reason alone. No one that is rich is presumably going to spend every waking hour in an office working with and for anal-retentive attorneys working inhuman hours and fighting over commas. It just does not happen. They will ride their horses, golf, or, better yet, take an extended vacation somewhere. While working in a law firm is interesting for a time, most rich people hire attorneys and do not work as attorneys.

Your identity is presumably wrapped up in working. For most attorneys, working is the most important thing in the world to them. Your education, experience, and everything is all about being an attorney practicing law. Practicing law should be more important to you than anything in the world. If you are not working something is seriously wrong. In the world of being an attorney, the first thing another attorney wants to know is where you are working. If you are not working, there is something wrong with you.

You Were Fired and Unable to Find a Position in the Amount of Time the Firm Gave You to Find a Job

Unless you did something really bad, most law firms give their attorneys time to find new positions. There is a rule of thumb I have learned regarding how long law firms give attorneys to find new positions when they fire them for all but the most serious reasons. The rule goes like this:

The Most Prestigious Law Firms

Option 1. If they are not pissed at you and like you, they will tell you that you are not going to make partner and should start looking for a job. The very best law firms will not give you any timeline. They may give you a timeline after a year and may ask you how your search is going after six months. Many will allow you to stay there indefinitely and may even change their mind if you start working hard in the future, bring in a substantial book of business and so forth.

Option 2. They will tell you that you have six months. Others will give you a year--many of the most prestigious may simply bring it up every six months for a few years and ask you how your search is going.

Option 3. If they are pissed for some reason, they will give you between three and six months.

When the most prestigious law firms let people go, they are most concerned about their brand, getting future business from you if you go in-house and how letting you go will affect the security of other attorneys. The best New York law firms (the very best) typically will not even cave in and let attorneys go during recessions. They are that good.

See [Top 10 Reasons Attorneys Trained in Major New York City Law Firms Command the Most Respect from the Market](#) for more information.

If you are not working and have been let go from a very prestigious law firm, other law firms will be very concerned about why you were unable to find a position in the time you had to find a job.

The Typical Prestigious Law Firm

Option 1. The typical prestigious law firm will give you between three and six months. In some cases, it will give the attorneys three months and allow them to use their voicemail and keep them on the website for six months.

Option 2. If they are pissed, they may let you go right away--or give you a month or a bit more. They will remove you from the website and not allow you to use their voicemail either.

Option 3. If they are in financial trouble--or numbers are down, or being led by a young megalomaniac management intent on increasing profits per partner at all costs and fast--they may let you go immediately or with a few weeks' notice. These law firms may or may not let you be on the website and use voicemail after they let you go for a few months.

Regardless of what is going on, most other law firms will expect you to be able to find a job if you were let go from the typical prestigious law firm within three to six months. If you were given less time, the law firm would presume you pissed someone off. If you are in "option 3", then no one cares--that is just bad luck for you: Be careful about the law firm you join.

The typical prestigious law firm may or may not be overly concerned with how its brand is perceived in the market and what its attorneys think about working there. The more the firm is "trying to be prestigious" and the less it is, the more it will believe that money is the only glue that is keeping people there--not its brand, not how attorneys perceive it in the market and not how its attorneys feel about working there. These sorts of firms are typically led by young management or firms that are "newly prestigious" for some reason. They believe that their ability to pay money makes them immune to the drawbacks associated with letting people go in a bad way.

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

The Typical Average Law Firm

Option 1. Two weeks to three months. The typically average law firm will let attorneys work there for at least a month after letting them go. Your stay on the firm website and use of voicemail may be negotiable.

Option 2. No notice and you need to go right away--regardless of whether or not they are pissed.

The less prestigious of a law firm you join, the more likely you are to have timing issues, and the more likely the firm can hurt your long-term chances when you are looking for a new position. This is one of the benefits of going to the most prestigious law firm possible--they are less likely to leave you unemployed and will do their best to make sure you land on your feet (even if it means they lose money).

One of the reasons it is important to go "all out" looking for a position when you lose your job is because law firms expect you to have the skills to marshal your defense. Your ability to defend yourself when you go down depends on knowing how to find people to help you (recruiters, peers, and others), and also work hard to find a position (by looking in another geographic area, for example). If you have not been able to find a position in the time allotted, this means you cannot proactively assist yourself in finding a new position and are unlikely to be a good advocate for your clients either.

If you are unemployed, there is also a presumption that you did not get much time because the law firm was pissed at you. If the law firm was pissed, this means you did something to piss off the firm. If you did something to piss off the firm, the law firm is not likely to have an interest in you because their presumption will be that there is something wrong with you.

See the following articles for more information:

[10 Ways to Get Fired from a Law Firm in Under 5 Minutes](#)

[What to Do When You Lose Your First Legal Job](#)

[If You Quit, They Believe You Will Be Hard to Manage and Will Quit There Too.](#)

Lots of attorneys quit their law firm and give two weeks' notice--some not even that. If you quit your legal job without giving notice, law firms will presume that you will quit if you are hired by another law firm too.

Attorneys give all sorts of reasons for quitting their law firms. Here are a few that I have heard recently:

Not getting the sort of work I wanted. This is a classic one. Attorneys quit law firms all the time--especially junior ones--because they feel they are not getting the sort of work and assignments they want. Work is a privilege and not a right. Most attorneys have odd reasons for an interest in a certain practice area anyway:

"I wanted white-collar work because I want to work for the US Attorney's Office one day."

"I wanted environmental work because I've always been interested in the environment."

"I want to go in-house one day, and the law firm was not giving me enough corporate work."

Law firms are businesses. They do the work they have and try and make a profit and pay you out of the work that comes in. Work is important to them--regardless of what it is. They do not care that you want to work in

the US Attorney's Office or go in-house. They have work that needs to be done for clients who are paying for it. One day you may be in a role of needing to get your work done as well. Quitting a law firm because you are not getting the sort of work you feel you are entitled to because you went to a good law school, or have certain long-term ambitions is asinine. This sense of entitlement will leave you without much of a career to talk about when you get older.

Other law firms know that you will quit working for them as well when you are not getting the work you believe you should. If you say this to one law firm and leave, for this reason, you will do so at the next. The most important thing for any attorney is to be working, and this is far more important than simply getting the work you are most interested in.

See [Love Your Work and the People Who Give It to You](#) for more information.

The environment was toxic. Lots of attorneys quit law firms because they believe the environments are toxic. All law firms are toxic. All law firms are filled with mean people, high pressure, too much work, rude clients, and unreasonable demands. This is just how it works--and it always has.

Working as an attorney is difficult and always has been. Your clients have challenging issues that are often toxic--and you are expected to deal with this. Regardless of your reasons for doing so, if you leave a law firm because you believe it is toxic, are likely to leave another one for the same reasons in the future and may not be a good fit for a law firm at all.

Another law hardly going to be willing to take a chance on you if they believe you might leave them if things ever get "toxic" in the future. Regardless of what law firm you left, the odds are that the entire law firm did not leave because it was "toxic. Therefore, you should not as well. Law firms want to hire the people that are going to stick it out when the going gets tough, and not those who are going to leave at the first sign of trouble.

See the following articles for more information:

[Surround Yourself with Positive People](#)

[The People You Work and Associate with Can Either Make or Break You](#)

[Be Around Those with High Expectations of You](#)

The firm was poorly run. Most law firms are poorly run. Attorneys are attorneys and not professional managers. They make the best use of their skills and attempt to run the best law firms they can. Moreover, there are going to be people who agree how to run a law firm and those who disagree--just look at how the Republicans and Democrats question each other on every issue that occurs that they are involved in day after day. This is just how it works in the market. If the law firm you left was poorly run, this is no surprise--what is surprising was that upon realizing this, you left the firm.

If you tell a law firm that you left because it was poorly run, subsequent law firms are likely to believe that you will leave there too--once you realize they as well. Lawyers are lawyers and not professional managers. It is a wonder that law firms function as well as they do.

There was not enough work. Many attorneys give notice and leave their law firms because there is not enough work. I'm sympathetic. Sitting around inside of a law firm without enough to do is something that I can imagine would be torture and not at all enjoyable. Nevertheless, quitting a law firm because there is not enough work is a bad move.

Attorneys are expected to be able to get work from other attorneys inside of their law firm--and as they get more senior get work on their own. If there is not enough work inside of your law firm, your job is to find more work--not quit because you cannot find any.

Even if there is not more work, you can write articles, do pro bono work and other tasks to keep yourself busy instead of simply leaving your law firm because there is not enough to do--and you will be getting paid to do

so. Leaving because there is not enough work is simply giving up, and law firms do not like it when people give up.

There was too much work. The only thing more confusing to subsequent law firms than the attorney who leaves because there is not enough work is the attorney who leaves because there is too much work.

Work is good. Law firms want a lot of work. Work is a sign of prosperity, that you are learning, that things are going well and that there may be a . Work is not evil to law firms, law firms want there to be a lot of work.

If you leave your law firm because there is too much work, subsequent law firms will question what will happen if they get too busy for your linking in the future as well. Being busy is a good thing. The last thing law firms want is to hire someone who is going to leave when it gets busy.

You were given too much responsibility. A new one I've heard recently is that attorneys leave because they feel like they have too much responsibility. This can be anything from being asked to handle a case, to be expected to close a deal without a lot of supervision. The problem with this is that law firms want to hire people that are aggressively seeking out more responsibility and not those who shy away from it. If you tell a law firm you quit because you were getting too much responsibility, their first reaction is going to be that you will need a lot of handholding. Instead of taking pressure off people, you will put more pressure on your supervisors.

Telling a law firm that you left because you too much responsibility is not likely to get you very far.

See [The Only Three Questions Law Firms Evaluate Applicants By](#) for more information.

If You Have Not Been Working for Some Time, Why Haven't Other People Hired You Already?

Once you lose a position with a law firm and are not working, your objective needs to be to find a new job as rapidly as possible--within days rather than weeks or months. While there is an argument to be made for holding out for a good position, it is important to understand that once you are unemployed, you will be all but untouchable by numerous law firms. Therefore, you should do everything within your power to find a position as rapidly as possible.

Once you are unemployed, the more time that goes by, the more it will appear to subsequent law firms that there is something wrong with you. An unemployed attorney sends a message to the market that they either (a) are not hungry to get a job, or (b) have something in their background that is making other law firms wary of hiring them. The more time that goes by, the more it will appear to other law firms that there might be some secret or some other thing in your background that is preventing you from getting hired by other law firms. When an attorney is looking for a job, it is important that they appear more desirable and not less desirable. If you are unemployed, you appear less desirable, and law firms are unlikely to be interested--especially if a great deal of time has gone by. The more time that goes by, the worse the situation gets and the more untouchable you become.

It is important to remember that law firms, especially the highest-paid law firms, have lots of people to choose from when hiring attorneys. In fact, the largest law firms typically receive hundreds of applicants for every opening. The majority of these applicants are not the sorts of attorneys firms would be interested in, and those in whom they are interested are almost universally employed. You have to remember that if you are competing with, say, ten other highly qualified attorneys for the same position, being someone who's unemployed can make you much less desirable than them. This is even the case where you may have better educational and work qualifications than the other attorneys. Your educational and work qualifications are less important to subsequent law firms than how well you do once you get into a law firm.

See the following articles for more information:

[How to Explain the Employment Gap in Your Resume](#)

[Does Being Long-term Unemployed Hurt Chances of Getting Back in the Legal Field?](#)

Unemployed and Looking to Increase Marketability

Attorneys Who Are Not Working Tend to Do Poorly Once the Attorneys Return to Law Firms.

Once an attorney gets back into a law firm after having lost a position, they tend not to be as good of a hire as an attorney that never lost a job. The reason for this is that attorneys who have lost their jobs in previous law firms lost them because there was something they did wrong-- or, they may just not have been able to do well enough in their previous law firm to keep their job. Regardless of the reasons that an attorney may not have been working, these are all danger signals to subsequent law firms, and in many cases, these danger signals are justified.

For example, the attorney who left because they did not like how the former law firm is managed is likely to find the same thing at the new law firm. The attorney who lost their job because they did not have enough hours may have had problems with their work quality, ability to get work from others, or simply did not work hard enough--and this will create problems in the new firm as well. The attorney who was fired for doing something wrong is more likely than an attorney who did not do something wrong to do something wrong again.

Another problem with attorneys who have lost their jobs is that they tend to be very paranoid and gun shy once they reach a new law firm. They are often angry at their previous law firm and feel a need to lash out at a new employer--especially when they were fired from the last employer. It is very common for attorneys that were fired from a previous employer to not last very long at a new employer even if they are not fired from the second firm: These attorneys tend to quit their new jobs for inconsequential reasons when they get to a new firm.

Most law firms have hired people in the past who were not working and had bad experiences when they did so. It is for this reason that law firms tend to be cautious about hiring people who are unemployed.

See the following articles for more information:

[Taking a Hiatus from Practicing Law](#)

[How Can I Come Back to the Practice of Law after Leaving for Several Years?](#)

[If You Are a Partner, the Law Firm Believes You Must Have Been Unprofitable for the Previous Firm and the Law Firm Does Not Want That Problem Either.](#)

Many partners bounce around from firm to firm. While there are many reasons for this movement, the overriding reason tends to be that these partners were unprofitable at their current firm and were either not paid as much as they wanted to be, or were asked to leave because their productivity did not match what they were expected to generate.

While there are exceptions to the rule, of course, many partners leave law firms again and again because they are not profitable for their existing firms and are asked to find new pastures. A law firm will presume that if you are not profitable in one place, you will not be profitable in a new place either. Nevertheless, there are many law firms that are always willing to take this chance, but many have been burned so many times that they are excessively cautious when hiring lateral partners.

See the following articles for more information:

[Top 9 Ways for Any Attorney to Generate a Ton of Business](#)

[30 Ways to Generate Business as an Attorney](#)

[Inexpensive Ways to Build Business Relationships](#)

[There Is Some Secret Thing Wrong with You \(Substance Abuse, Mental Health, Health Problems, or Family Problems\) That the New Law Firm Will Need to Deal With If They Hire You.](#)

To protect their brand, law firms typically will try and keep it quiet when they let attorneys go for reasons involving substance abuse, mental health problems, and the like. Nevertheless, attorneys do tend to suffer from these sorts of issues--likely at a greater proportion than other professionals--and law firms let them go for these sorts of reasons all the time.

Many attorneys with drug and alcohol problems will use the excuse of family problems for missing work or inexplicable absences and so forth from the office, missed deadlines and the like. After a while, these excuses become frequent enough that the law firm will know that there is something else wrong. Other attorneys have various psychological problems that they attempt to deal with privately--often without treatment--and this makes it difficult for them to practice in law firms in the long term. Because attorneys spend so much time at work, the law firm will often easily be able to pick up on the issues and will let them go rather than having the attorney get treatment. Still, other attorneys may have various health problems that make it difficult for them to commit to a law firm in the way they may need to earn the law firm money.

Over the years, I have seen all sorts of excuses that attorneys have made inside of law firms and outside of law firms.

I saw one attorney with a serious crystal meth addiction use the excuse that one of his children was disabled to frequently miss work despite the fact that the child wasn't disabled at all. This attorney was fired.

I saw another attorney with a serious alcohol addiction tell his law firm that his liver was failing and he needed a liver transplant--which was true, but was due to alcohol--rather than admit substance abuse problems. This attorney was fired.

I saw another attorney who had a tough break-up with her boyfriend that drove her into a downward mental spiral use the excuse that someone in her family had died to deal with her depression and anxiety--for several months--before getting fired.

The excuses attorneys use and have used with law firms in the past are so numerous it would be difficult for me to recall them all here. Nevertheless, when these sort of issues arise, law firms often quietly let attorneys go, and in some cases even give them generous severance pay so they do not have to deal with them. Future law firms may be left wondering why these attorneys were unemployed. The reasons given are often cryptic and odd, and this will send out warning signals as well. Regardless, law firms want to avoid hiring attorneys who have had issues like this, and doing so is a real priority for them.

See [What Should I Tell Prospective Firms If My Previous Firm Won't Admit Publicly Why I Was Fired?](#) for more information.

You Have Not Made Any Friends in the Legal Community in Current or Past Jobs (or Otherwise) Who Are Available to Help You--There Is Something Wrong with Your Networking Ability.

Practicing law in a law firm means being part of a "tribe"--and tribe members protect one another. You are also expected to make friends with attorneys who may have left the firm, and even your peers in past jobs and law school, for example. If you are in trouble and have been out of work--especially for an extended period--law firms may wonder why you have not been able to make use of your contacts to get a new position.

Attorneys who do a good job inside of their law firms will often be protected by those law firms if the law firm needs to let them go. For example, some of the most prestigious law firms will often put attorneys they do not have work for in [in-house positions](#), or will refer them to smaller law firms that do work for them. Also, if you do very good work for certain partners in the law firm and they cannot afford to keep you around, those partners will often find a place for you to land on your feet. If you have a good reputation in the legal community, you should have contacts that you can draw on so you are not unemployed for an extended period.

In most cases, an attorney will be able to find a new position quite quickly if they lose a job and have lots of

contacts and people that want to help them in the legal community. If you do not have these contacts, this means that you may not have sufficiently impressed the people you worked with, made friends, or networked in the right way during your legal career. Law firms want to hire people who can network and have a positive reputation in the legal community. This networking ability and reputation is something that enables more senior attorneys to get clients, for example. Therefore, if you have been unemployed for an extended period, this sends a message to other law firms that there is something wrong with your past performance and networking ability, and they will want to avoid you.

See the following articles for more information:

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

[10 Ways to Reciprocate in Networking](#)

[Get a Job Through Networking](#)

[Ways to Leverage Your Network](#)

[You Are Not Working Because You Are Not Sure You Want to Practice Law.](#)

If you have excellent qualifications and have lost your job and are not working, the most logical explanation is the most Freudian one as well: You are not working because you do not want to.

Many attorneys who I speak with in the course of my work are not working because they do not want to be practicing law. It is not uncommon for attorneys--especially those who worked in New York City and other ultracompetitive markets--to get so burned out that when they stop working in a law firm for whatever reason, they find innumerable excuses not to apply for a job, not to go back, to do poorly in interviews and, when they do get a job, often find reasons not to accept the offer.

The fact of the matter is that there are many attorneys who are not working who simply do not want to be working. A law firm is not the best place for many attorneys. Those who are not working in them and are unemployed may often be in this situation because they simply are not interested in working within a law firm. Many get fired on purpose--although they often tell themselves that they did not. Also, many attorneys play mind games with themselves where they will continually tell themselves they want to work in a law firm when they do not. They may contact recruiters, apply for jobs and take other actions that make it look like they want to work in a law firm, but their only reason for doing so is that they feel they should work in a law firm, when deep down they know they should not.

If an attorney has excellent qualifications and has been unemployed for some time, one thing that law firms will often think is that this person does not want to be working in a law firm. A smart partner interviewing an attorney will quickly pick up on this. Another thing that I have often seen is when an attorney is hired laterally for a law firm, they may also quickly end up leaving that same law firm because they do not feel like they belong there and do not want to be practicing law. They will find an in-house position, and sometimes even quit the law firm with nothing else lined up.

A law firm does not want to be another experiment on your journey to self-exploration. They want to be your number one choice, and they wanted you to be 100% committed to practicing law there.

See the following articles for more information:

[Why You Should \(and Should Not\) Quit the Practice of Law](#)

[Why You Should Quit Practicing Law](#)

[The Practice of Law: To Stay or Go](#)

[25 Reasons Most Attorneys Hate the Practice of Law and Go Crazy \(and What to Do about It\)](#)

[60 Nontraditional Jobs You Can Do with a Law Degree \(and Should Strongly Consider Doing\)](#)

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

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

Require Practicing Law

What to Do If You Hate Your Attorney Job

Top 5 Ways to Know When it is Time to Quit Being a (Big Law) Attorney

Law Firms Have Plenty of Other Choices and Would Rather Hire Someone Working.

As discussed above, law firms have many choices when hiring lateral attorneys. If an attorney is working, they're presumed to be more committed, do better work, have not been fired, be likely to fit into the law firm, more easily manageable, and more. Law firms have no interest hiring attorneys at lateral levels who are likely to be problematic and not committed to the next law firm. Why would they? They can pay very high salaries and have lots of applicants applying for the same positions in a short period of time. In the largest legal markets, top law firms may have 20+ highly qualified applicants for every open legal position.

See the following articles for more information:

[Why You Can Never Stop Practicing Law for More Than a Few Weeks Once You Start](#)

[Legal Career Suicide: Quitting a Job without Having another One Lined Up](#)

[No, You Should Not Quit Your Job before Securing a New One](#)

Conclusions

I wish it were easier for attorneys who are unemployed to get lateral positions. Unfortunately, an attorney's odds of getting a position laterally when they are unemployed are much worse than when they are employed. I would say it is a minimum of 5 to 10 times more difficult to get a position when an attorney is unemployed than when they are employed.

To find out what to do about this situation if you are unemployed, please review this article:

[As an Unemployed Associate, How Can I Best Position Myself to Get Placed with a Top Law Firm?](#)

See the following articles for more information:

[Beware! Once You Start Working in a Law Firm, If You Leave You Will Almost Certainly Not Be Able to Return](#)

[Simplifying the Complications in Your Story](#)

[How to Handle a Big Law Layoff](#)

[Associate about to Be Let Go Unsure How to Handle Reason for Leaving in Interviews](#)

[Recently Laid-off Associate Unsure How to Handle Job Status in Interviews](#)

[Laid-off Attorney Thinks Telling the Truth Will Hurt His Job Hunt](#)

[Avoiding the "L" Word: Layoff](#)

[Steps for a Solid Recovery Once You've Been Laid Off](#)

[Why Most Attorneys Are Depressed and Unhappy](#)

[The Only Way to Be Happy Practicing Law](#)