

# What to Do if You Are a Law Firm Partner Without Business

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**Summary:** Are you stuck at a firm that doesn't encourage your business development? Are you not gaining the experience you hoped for? Learn what your options are in this article.

I speak with partners, senior associates, counsel, and others--daily--that have no business and who are extremely concerned about their prospects because:

They have had work and lost this work;

[They aren't getting enough work and know their positions are](#) in jeopardy;

They do not enjoy the feeling of being controlled and not following their own destiny;

They have been asked to leave;

They had their compensation cut so much that they need to leave.

Sound familiar? If you are a partner without business, here is what you can do.

## 1. You Can Go In-House

[This is something that practically every attorney I ever speak with "defaults" to. Whether they are associates, partners, or counsel, everyone seems to talk and aspire to go in-house](#) as if this is something that will magically cure their situation and unease with being under pressure to generate business. The "fantasy" is that you will have one client, you can concentrate all your effort on this client, and everyone will be more successful.

Yes, you can go in-house, and if you are in-house, you will not be expected to generate business. Despite this fact, however, [working in house is an even more dangerous proposition in many cases than working in a law firm.](#)

Among some of the [more common reasons going in-house](#) can be even riskier than remaining in a law firm are:

You are a cost center (you do not generate revenue unlike in a law firm) and could lose your job at any time. Companies fail and go through major problems (layoffs and force reductions) more frequently than law firms. Companies are even more political than law firms. The CEO, General Counsel, and others may be replaced--and or move on--frequently. When they do, the new replacement will often eliminate the existing people in the legal department and hire their own.

There is often even more age discrimination inside of companies than law firms. Companies typically want younger people in their legal departments.

Your skills will often deteriorate rapidly.

These are just [a few of the reasons that going in-house is risky](#). I review resumes all day long of [attorneys looking for jobs](#). The typical pattern I see is of an attorney starting their career at a good law firm and maybe even having a stable run of five, ten years or more at the firm. At some point, a company appears on the resume. Once a company appears, the resume is suddenly littered with several companies and various periods of unemployment. Every few years the attorney ends up moving it seems. Going in-house is not a stable career choice.

If you insist on going in-house, here are a few recommendations of the best way to do this.

First, you should try and go in-house with a client you have worked for. If your billing rate is \$1000 an hour, the client is going to realize that there is going to be [massive cost savings to hiring you](#) rather than paying a law firm. Moreover, you are likely to have longstanding and solid relationships with your client that will make them trust you and feel comfortable hiring you and value you.

Second, you should not rely on recruiters to find you an in-house opening. Most in-house openings are not filled by recruiters because (1), unlike law firms, most companies do not use recruiters to fill legal openings (they are filled informally) (I would estimate 98%+ of in-house openings are filled without recruiters), (2) most companies can fill in-house openings informally, or by posting positions on their own internal job sites. If you are seeking an in-house position, one good place to find these jobs is on LawCrossing.com, or by hiring the company to apply to these positions to you using LawCrossing Concierge.

Third, you will often be much better off working in a stable, smaller, private, family-owned company than a larger one. Smaller companies allow you to become close to the owner. Once a company becomes public, or is owned and controlled by a private equity company, for example, this may result in you being in a more prestigious role, or having higher compensation; however, the drawback will be that you are far more likely to find yourself unemployed. Private equity companies and boards of public companies typically have a long line of people they will replace you with if they are unhappy with not even your performance--just the overall performance of the company. Privately held, family-owned companies are more likely to value your relationship with the company and contribution.

Fourth, companies are often even more concerned with culture fit than law firms. You need to work in a company that is a good cultural fit. While a [law firm is likely to be most interested in your qualifications and ability to generate fees](#), companies will often be more concerned with your "cultural fit" with the company. Companies often interview scores of candidates for in-house positions and spend months searching due to looking for the "right" cultural fit. If you want to work inside a company, you will be judged based on your ability to fit in with the culture of the firm as much as anything. One mistake that attorneys make is that because they are so interested in going in-house, they often take the first position offered. They do this without giving serious consideration to whether or not they will fit in with the culture. This is a huge mistake. If you do not fit in with the culture of many companies, you will be quickly expelled like a virus.

Fifth, unless you are going to a private company, [it is risky to go in-house](#) unless you are a subject matter expert in something. You should have skills that are rare in finance, patent law, litigation, or something similarly niche. One attorney I knew who was successful going in-house went to work for a FinTech company where he helped them launch a credit card and navigate state and federal regulations. I know several patent attorneys that have gone in-house at public drug companies who have done well patenting and protecting the patents of various medicines. I know one litigator that went to work for an entertainment company that frequently dealt with First Amendment issues and was an expert in that. In each case, these attorneys had good careers there. In contrast, if you go in-house as a generalist, it can be risky because you have nothing unusual and rare that motivates the company to keep you there.

Sixth, if you enter the company at a General Counsel or similar role where you are interfacing with the CEO, owners, and others in the Company, you need to be prepared to be very good at showing the company how to bend the rules. Many companies operate in the "grey area" when it comes to following the law. They may not overtly break the law, but they play close to the edge. If you are in a substantial percentage of companies, you will be expected to show leaders how to operate in this grey area, keep secrets and help the company make more money by doing so. If you do not do this, you are likely to lose your job and be fired for reasons related solely to this--but the company will give other reasons, of these sorts of games.

If you are interested in going in-house and this is an option you are seriously considering, please review [LawCrossing.com](#), or [LawCrossing Concierge](#) for in-house jobs. Over 95% of in-house jobs are filled without recruiters, and this is where you can find them. [There are tens of thousands more in-house jobs on LawCrossing](#) than you will find on any other site.

## 2. You Can Become a Subject Matter Expert and Build a Book Internally and Externally

One of the best ways to keep your job inside of your law firm is to become a subject matter expert and someone that attorneys within your firm turn to for help. If you become someone that is considered to have outstanding and rare abilities and enthusiasm for a certain subject specialty, your law firm will be more likely to give you work and keep you around, and outside clients will be more likely to find you when they need help. Your expertise in a given subject matter will ensure you are the only logical choice when various issues come up.

I know of a partner in a major law firm that never has had any substantial business, but is considered a very good proofreader and editor of other attorneys' briefs. Incredibly, he is a named partner in a law firm with over \$1-billion in revenue. By becoming the "go to" attorney for editing important briefs for other partners, he has established himself as an expert that others turn to for help.

I know of another partner in a major law firm in Texas that does not have a substantial book of business but is an expert in negotiating M&A deals. He sits down with the other side and has a folksy attitude, is very likable and disarms the other side. Somewhere along the way, the terms of every deal change and his client ends up with far more than they thought they were going to get.

I know of another partner in a major New York law firm that is one of 30+ ERISA/Executive Compensation partners in his firm. He has particular expertise in negotiating contracts for a certain type of banker. The firm represents a lot of these banks, and it is an important part of their business, and they keep feeding him work and compensating him very well. There are very few people in the world that can do the sort of work he is doing.

I know of another attorney that made his career representing people in disputes about domain names and cyber-squatting and bringing claims on behalf of large companies that were suing smaller competitors doing this. Whenever this matter came up in the law firm, they would refer him cases, and he would do these matters.

You need to go "all in" and make others in the firm want to sell you and your unique skills to clients. At least one of the attorneys above wrote a treatise in their branch of law and built his entire career around this. Many attorneys also teach classes in law schools in this subject matter as well. Whatever you can do to appear like a subject matter expert and someone that needs to be brought in on matters you should do. You need to create reasons for other attorneys to want to refer business to you and sell them on the reasons this will help their clients. You need to make it seem like, if your firm's attorneys ask for your help with a given client matter, they are heroes to their clients.

One of the first steps to bringing in work as a partner without business is [doing this within your firm](#). You need to fight hard for a niche to represent and be seen as the only logical choice in that niche. Also, if you establish a reputation in that niche, you will slowly build up a network of referrals that will assist you in generating business. People want to refer others to people they know are very good at something. Your first step to generating a large book will generally start with referrals within your firm. The more enthusiastic you seem about your work and your niche expertise, the better off you will be.

**IMPORTANT POINT:** At the outset, I want to point out that one of the issues I often notice with partners without business is that they lack enthusiasm for the practice of law and seem more focused on finding fault with their firm, the market and other factors in the market than others. When I speak with partners with books of \$10,000,000 or more (and there are a lot of partners like this in most major cities), they have a level of enthusiasm that is palatable. They understand their subject matter very well and are also enthusiastic. They genuinely want to solve their clients' issues and are interested in what they are doing. They also tend to be

the sorts of people that will get a legal issue and dive deep into it to make sure they understand everything. The very best ones become subject matter experts--but many do not need to.

If you are a partner without business, one of your main problems may be that you are not enthusiastic about what you are doing; you do not inspire confidence that you can help others and this is being picked up by the market. The market and people in it want to give work to the attorneys that are most enthusiastic and they believe will do the best job. People want to be represented by those they believe are the most enthusiastic about them as well. Becoming a subject matter expert is one way to do this.

### 3. You Can Become Indispensable to a Powerful Partner (or Group of Partners)

Another [common way attorneys become partners in large law firms](#) and stay employed in these firms is to become the "go to person" for doing the majority of work for a powerful partner with a large book. If you are a partner without a book of business, it is common sense that you need to ingratiate yourself with the attorney with the largest book of business you can in your firm and become indispensable to him. This is advice I give associates, counsel, and partners without business all the time. You need to let politics go and realize that the hands that feed you are the partners with the most business in your firm. Regardless of how you feel about these people, if you are going to survive you need to make them like you and care about you. They can change your life.

As I was writing this article, I was traveling back from a conference in Silicon Valley. I was sitting on the plane next to an attorney I noticed was reading an article on Law360 on his cell phone. I asked him if he was an attorney and he told me he was. He was an equity partner at Latham & Watkins and had visited his firm's Silicon Valley office for the day. It turned out we knew many of the same people and had a nice conversation on the way back. His story, however, was a common one I often hear from people able to become equity partners in major firms where they make millions of dollars a year. As a young associate, he was the "go to" person for a partner with a ton of business in a sub-specialty in the M&A space. This specialty was such that very few attorneys around the country represented these sorts of companies and the issues that came up in these mergers were unique enough that every deal he worked on gave him more and more knowledge that was crucial to doing a good job in these deals.

He worked for this partner for several years and got to know all the clients. When the partner retired, he gave him part of his book of business (around \$3,000,000) when he was a senior associate. He built up the book, and the firm eventually made him a partner (this was before Latham went to a two-tier partnership). Without that relationship with the partner and the client, he would never have become an equity partner in the firm.

I speak with young associates and others at major law firms all the time that are interested in becoming partners in firms where it is considered next to impossible to become a partner. The only way you can do this in most of these firms is to bring in institutional clients who will consistently give you a ton of work. Without the skills to bring in these clients as an associate, the best way to do this quite often is to cultivate relationships with senior attorneys with large books who will retire at some point in the not too distant future--or who have enough work to give to trusted associates and partners that they do not have work for themselves.

**IMPORTANT POINT:** One of the main issues that associates and senior associates run into when they are trying to build these important relationships is one of trust. Trust relationships can take years, or even a decade or more to develop. What I mean by this is that if a partner is going to trust work to an associate, trust them with their clients and protect them and possibly advance them to partnership in the firm, they need to have a deep trust for them. They need to believe that the person they are giving work to their back, will never speak negatively about them and will be their eyes and ears in the firm and tell them what is going on, who to watch out for, if the client may be upset about something, or more. Most associates and many senior associates and young partners never develop these relationships of trust because they always seem more

willing to find fault with the firm, the partners they work for and side against management--or at least appear that way. The law firm and partners within it want to protect themselves and will expel people like this like viruses. Smart young partners and associates know that the key to their success is forming the strongest possible relationships they can with people inside the law firm that can help them. They are very careful about taking sides because they understand their long-term objective is to stay employed and busy in the firm.

The problem with this strategy is that it may or may not work.

This strategy can work well if you do something that is transactional such as real estate, patent, or corporate-related work. I have seen some partners be very well compensated over for decades just by riding the coattails of powerful partners in various transactional-related areas. If a given partner within the firm has one or more strong institutional relationships, this can result in them being able to feed work to other partners and keep them occupied indefinitely. I know of several partners in Los Angeles in their 70s who have had other partners in their firms working directly for them for over 30 years--you can have a very good career if you attach yourself to a powerful partner.

There is a risk to this, however. This may not always work as well if you do litigation-related work in particular. One thing I have seen in recent years, for example, is that a lot of patent-litigation-related work has gone away. Many partners were able to become partners and have good, long runs doing these cases that were sourced by others. Suddenly over the past several years a lot of these cases have gone away. When this work disappears, there is not much left for partners to do--despite being connected to a powerful partner.

Also, powerful partners with large books of business will often be poached by other law firms interested in their consistent recurring revenue. These other law firms will offer the acquired partner more money, but in return will often want them to not bring other partners with them. They will justify this by stating they can have senior associates and counsel-level attorneys do the same work, at a lower cost, for example. I am a party to these conversations all the time, and about half the time the partner with the business will leave those without business stranded at their prior firm. Because they do not have any work and due to the ill will of their prior loyalty to the partner with business, these partners will often not last long at the firm after the partner with business. The point is that, if you cast your lot with a partner with business, this can be risky as well.

#### 4. You Can Get on Committees Inside Your Law Firm

In most law firms, partners with business are not interested in being on committees. They view these as a waste of time that could be used for billing, or generating business--but that is not always so. The benefit of being on committees is that these committees will often determine all sorts of important things that happen in the firm and determine whether or not a partner will survive. Committees are used to set compensation, determine hiring needs, spending on firm infrastructure and more. If you can get on the right committee, you can also give yourself other things to do in the firm that do not involve billing hours but which the firm needs to be done by partners. In some cases, the committee may even create a new job for you that does not involve practicing law very much but has various benefits associated with it. Becoming part of the bureaucratic machinery of the law firm can be tremendously beneficial because you can also form alliances with the decision makers who have control over your fate inside of the law firm.

While I hate to say it, the committee can be a good way to protect yourself. Committees tend to be very effective ways to isolate yourself from the pressure of billing hours inside of the largest law firms. The larger (and older) the law firm, the more bureaucratic it becomes and the more opportunities you will have to insert yourself into the machinery of the law firm. I have seen attorneys survive for decades by becoming bureaucrats inside of law firms in addition to practicing law there.



One issue with becoming a bureaucrat inside of law firms, though, is that law firms that allow this too permissively often start experiencing problems. Because bureaucrats protect themselves, they start taking from partners with business and more productive members of the firm. Bureaucrats do more and more of this and start rewarding people based on alliances more so than their productivity. As this behavior increases, those with business who are productive start resenting this and end up taking their business elsewhere. This affects the profitability of the firm, departures increase, and problems often arise.

Typically, the job of a bureaucrat partner inside of a law firm is also not a long-term proposition. As younger ranks of partners come up the chain of command, they will most often start aiming for the dead weight inside of committees. They will use their business and the power this is giving them in the firm to start moving out partners without business.

Law firms that become overly bureaucratic also often end up having issues surviving. They compensate the wrong the attorneys and create a reward system that is based on being the most political and not generating business, or being the best attorneys possible.

## 5. You Can Run the Summer Program, On-Campus Recruiting and Be a Mentor to New and Young Associates

While this does not sound like it is something that protects partners without business inside of law firms, this is a strategy that I see young partners constantly doing. Since most older partners do not want to be involved in the summer program or a mentor to new associates, these partners take the lead with this. They become the face of the summer program and someone who becomes the face of the firm. While this strategy does a job that needs to be done, it is rarely one who buys the young partner much time. At least every few months I speak with partners who tell me that they are considered "great mentors" to associates, or run the summer program.

While being a mentor may be something that is necessary in large law firms, this is a role that is discounted by most law firms where the average associate is a dispensable commodity in the market. Moreover, while camaraderie and making associates comfortable is valued to the degree it produces a functional environment, most law firms place far more value on bringing in business and billing hours. Most law firms also know that people who volunteer for these sorts of positions more often tend to do so because it is the best value they can offer in a leadership capacity in the firm.

Partners who mentor young associates and summers also find themselves in a position where they are listening to them complain about various issues all the time. They then bring these issues to management which begins to resent these complaints and the partner bringing them. The management--and partners in management--are often more concerned about doing their work than listening to associates' gripes reported by another partner (especially one without business!). Also, as the partner experiences push-back about the complaints and begins to side with summer associates and others against management, they can often become resented themselves and begin to resent the firm as they realize many of these complaints are true. All in all, partners that get in these roles often do not last long for obvious reasons.

## 6. You Can Start Generating Business

This is the most obvious solution to your problem. If you do not have business...why not start getting business?

I have seen multiple partners "saved" by going from no business to massive business overnight. One partner I knew at a major law firm did not have any work for a few years and then suddenly brought in defense work for a major class action that kept him occupied for almost a decade.

Most partners who develop huge and formidable books of business spend a lot of time out of the office meeting with clients. They spend at least a few nights a week out to dinner meeting with clients and traveling to conferences and networking. They make sure they position themselves as specialists in the market and present themselves as such to potential clients constantly. They do not show up to work, sit at their desk and hope work appears. They get out and do what they can to generate work both from potential new clients and older ones. If you do not have work, make no mistake about it: It is a crisis. This is how legal careers end, or do not reach their full potential.

If you do not have any business, you need to realize that the practice of law is a game and at the partner level, the majority of the game is about generating business. You need to switch gears and learn everything you can about what it takes to generate business in a law firm.

You should be watching what attorneys who generate business do.

You should be reading everything you can about how to generate work in a service business.

You should be making business generation a priority in your day-to-day and carving out time for this.

Getting and generating business is extremely important. Incredibly, the legal market often portrays it as something that is uncouth, or disrespectful to be doing. It is not. The people that probably created that perception had a lot of work and did not want you stealing their business or their clients. The only thing that can bring you disrespect is not having enough business. The business provides you with a higher income, more power, more security and more happiness in your life. You need business and should learn everything you can about getting it.

In addition to getting business, you also need to learn how to generate recurring business. This means doing good work for the clients you do get, ensuring that you have "top of mind awareness" with your clients by staying in touch with them and marketing additional services to your existing clients constantly. It is not a matter of just getting a client once; it is about getting the client to continually refer work to you (and refer others to you as well).

## 7. You Can Move to Another Office of Your Firm

Many attorneys without enough business [move to other offices](#). I saw many litigators without lots of work move to their law firms' New York offices to do mortgage-related litigation following the financial crisis--there was more than enough work for senior-level litigators to do in many of these firms. If you are smart, you can get a sense of where the work is in various offices and try and move to these offices to get more work. This does not work far more often than it works, but it can work. In California, I've seen countless "slow" corporate partners move to their firm's offices Silicon Valley and keep themselves busier there. If you are in an office without a lot of work, being willing to be mobile is something that can be extremely beneficial.

If this is something that is a possibility for you, it could save your career. It is [important to be geographically flexible](#) to the maximum extent you can in your career.

## 8. You Can Quit Practicing and Start a Business Doing Something Else

[Quitting the practice of law is often an excellent choice](#) if you do not have any business. This is something that partners, associates and others in the legal profession have always done and it can be a very smart move.

A law firm can be a very constraining environment. Creativity is often not valued, and there is sometimes the perception that there are limits to what you can achieve--especially if you are on a salary. Many attorneys also have a history of being passionate about something in their past--they are high achievers and in

addition to school were often very good at other things. I've seen countless attorneys start successful businesses doing something else. If you are passionate about something, this can be a very good idea.

One of the things that makes starting a business so attractive is that there are often far more opportunities in other endeavors than there are in practicing law. An attorney practicing law is competing against countless very smart people for a limited amount of work. An attorney doing something else can enter a field with fewer competitors, where the competitors are not as driven, or intelligent as the typical attorney. I used to be an asphalt contractor in Detroit and made far more money doing this in my early 20s than I ever made practicing law in major law firms. I was competing against many people who in most cases uneducated, did not want to work hard, were disorganized and could not appear professional to clients. While not all contractors were like this, the majority was, and it was very easy for me to compete with them. If you do not want to practice law, starting a business can be a very good career move for you.

## 9. You Can Lie About How Much Business You Have and Move to a New Firm (Not Recommended)

This is a very common thing among young partners especially. Law firms love young, promising partners that appear poised to be the next generation of leadership for their firm. These partners will represent to a recruiter and new firms in the market that they have anywhere from \$1,000,000 to \$3,000,000 or more of portable business. Clean cut, enthusiastic and seemingly being courted by many large law firms, these partners will impress potential law firms.

The problem is that this business often does not exist. The [partner will be hired by the new law firm](#), and when they get there, the partner will gradually reveal that the business they had anticipated bringing with them did not materialize--one excuse or another will be given. Rather than let the partner go immediately, the embarrassed law firm will give the attorney time to re-establish their book while one excuse after another is given. Reluctantly, some partners will share business with this partner. This desperate partner--realizing they could lose their job at their new firm any moment--will often try and get close to clients they do work for and inject doubt into the quality of service they are receiving from the partner that was nice enough to give the work (with the objective, of course, of stealing the client in the future). Sometimes the partner is about to steal one or two clients and move to a new firm with them.

There are partners in major cities around the country that have been moving about playing some version of this game for years--the game ends eventually, but it can go on for some time.

In many cases, the lies are a little more innocent. For example, the partner may say they have twice as much portable business as they do. This is more common and something that many law firms have come to expect. If someone says, they have \$2,000,000 in portable business they estimate it is closer to \$1,000,000 and so on.

## 10. You Can Move into the Government, Teach, or Another Practice Setting

Many attorneys without business successfully move into government positions, teaching jobs, or [other practice settings](#). It is common for litigators to go to work as prosecutors, or in other government-related positions such as judgeships. It is also common for graduates of many top law schools to go back and teach in law schools.

If you are interested in a legal career with the [government](#), or another practice setting, please review [www.Lawcrossing.com](http://www.Lawcrossing.com), or hire [LawCrossing Concierge](#) to search out and apply to those jobs for you. There are thousands more government jobs on [LawCrossing](#) than you will find on any other site.

## 11. You Can Start a Solo Practice



I've seen many attorneys do this successfully after being unable to generate business at a large law firm. This too can be a very successful and smart career move. If you start a solo practice, you will suddenly be able to bring in smaller matters and do all sorts of work you would not necessarily be able to bring in if you were in a larger firm.

I have seen attorneys:

with no experience in a given practice area start small solo practices doing things like family law (which can be extremely profitable), personal injury law and employment law--to name a few;  
Corporate attorneys start thriving practices advising numerous small companies;  
ERISA and tax attorneys build thriving practices.

In fact, in virtually every practice area out there I've seen attorneys succeed--and they succeed more often than they fail. Also, many of these solo attorneys went on to grow their solo practices into large law firms.

The attorneys that succeed at this treat their solo practices like a serious job. In almost all cases, the successful ones lease offices and go into work each day. They do not work from home--they get out. They spend time marketing and find ways to build clients. One of the pitfalls, however, can be that these solo practitioners often get "stiffed" by clients, and this ends up creating issues for them as well.

## 12. You Can Move to a Small, Growing Firm

If you are an attorney without business, [you can also move to a smaller firm](#). If you have sophisticated experience or big firm credentials, you may find a small, growing law firm is interested in you. Newer law firms after often started by younger attorneys with an incredible knack for branding themselves and bringing in business. These attorneys then bring in partners without business from large law firms to make themselves look even more formidable in the eyes of clients and, importantly, can do the sophisticated work required. If you are fortunate enough to find one of these firms--and they exist in every major city--you can do very well. As a legal recruiter, I am constantly on the lookout for law firms like this, and they can be an amazing source of jobs. These are often firms you have not heard of, and we learn about them by monitoring legal publications, carefully reviewing every firm on resumes that comes into our recruiting company and speaking with attorneys all day, every day. This is one area where a talented recruiter can make a difference and save your career.

When we see attorneys moving from a major firm to a small law firm we then review the small law firm and see that it is doing significant things in the market, attracting good people and major clients. These sorts of law firms are popping up all the time and [are interested in hiring partners to do the work they are bringing in](#). Whether it is Seattle, Los Angeles, or New York, there are countless firms like these rising and hiring partners without business all the time.

## 13. You Can Take a Job that Does Not Require a Law Degree

I have seen many attorneys I have known take jobs inside of businesses that do not even require a law degree. I saw one attorney run a chain of appliance stores and another become a financial adviser. The number of positions you can do without a law degree is quite limitless. If you are motivated and have good interpersonal skills, you can often do exceptionally well as an attorney doing anything requiring sales skills. I know of many attorneys who became very successful real estate agents, for example. The ability attorneys have to present facts in the most favorable light makes them outstanding in any position requiring sales.

In terms of working inside of companies, I have seen labor and employment attorneys become outstanding human resources executive. I have watched corporate attorneys go into finance positions, or even be CFOs. I

know of numerous attorneys that became CEOs of companies. The motivation attorneys have, the thinking they learn as attorneys, and the competitive environments they come out of making them well suited to do incredibly well inside of businesses and often grow them--but not always.

#### 14. You Can Do an All-Out Search to Find a Firm that is Interested in You

If you want a new position and want to keep working, you need to find a legal recruiter with resources and some balls. I make placements of partners without business at least a few times a month--sometimes each week; however, I only do this when my candidates are willing to look at the full market - and often it requires looking nationally. If you have experience with a major law firm, or if you have unique, specialized experience, the odds are there will be firms in your market that are interested in you. This means, however, that you may need to allow your recruiter to try and sell your profile to many, many firms. It may be 20 firms, or it may be 200+.

At BCG Attorney Search, we keep track of every firm that has ever had an opening for the past 20 years; we keep track of who interviews who and we have access to jobs and this data for the entire United States--we are the only legal recruiting firm that has this much information. We have a staff of over 150 people that do nothing but gather and then use this information, data science and machine learning to predict the best place for you. Despite all of this, it is an imperfect science. We need to find a firm that needs someone to do senior level work in your practice area.

Attorneys are regularly amazed when they see the results I can get for them. They often wind upon in other areas of the country, or world, but in good jobs. Partners from Chicago find jobs in Seattle. Partners in Washington, DC find positions in Shanghai. The list is endless. If you use a placement agency and not a recruiting firm you are going to get far different results than if you trust your search to a recruiter that just sends you out to a few random firms. A targeted, aggressive and significant approach works. It changes lives, and it can keep your career going a long, long time. I've placed partners without business who are in their 70s.

Unfortunately, despite the fact I can place partners that give me "free reign" at least a few times a month, in most cases the partners I speak with are not interested in being marketed aggressively. Instead, they listen to my recommendations and then decide that they need an approach that introduces them to just a few firms--and they often never find the position they are looking for. If it were a perfect market, this approach would work. Unfortunately, law firms are businesses, and you need to find someone willing to purchase what you are selling. Selling yourself should not be about your ego. Your ego is not the one hiring you and paying your bills and supporting your family. You need to get rid of your ego. In terms of ego, attorneys in New York City are among the worst--they are some of the most employable attorneys in the country because of their drive and skills but at the same time the most likely to leave the practice of law (and New York City without a legal job) when they do not aggressively market themselves to many potential buyers/law firms.

Investment banks and other professionals selling a business will market the business to anyone and everyone that might want to buy it. They do this because this is what works--and a lot of money is at stake. You too need to be marketed to a lot of people if you want to be sold. You (often) have no other choice if you want to find the best possible opportunity in the market. Just because a law firm rejected you years ago does not mean they will now. There are so many things you may not be aware of that could be going on inside a law firm:

A partner in a practice group may be retiring and left a bunch of work no one at a senior level knows how to do.

The firm may have brought in a new case, transaction, series of transactions, client(s) that need your expertise.

One of my first placements involved placing a RETIRED securities partner with Preston Gates (now K&L

Gates) in Seattle who had not practiced law in five years. The existing securities lawyer there was going to work for Bill Gates at Microsoft. Another one of my early placements came about because I read an article in the San Francisco Recorder about a small firm in Silicon Valley that said it was very busy--that was not even in Martindale or only. Here, I placed an attorney that had been FIRED from a job as an equity partner in a major law firm in Los Angeles because they found out (and newspapers found out and wrote about it) that he was married to multiple women at the same time. He had not worked in over a year. The firm he went to was subsequently acquired by one of the ten largest law firms in the world where he is still today. The point is that partners without business are employable if you know where to look and look hard enough. Both of those firms did not have any openings, and I created them and changed each of their lives.

You just never know. The only way you know this is if you have a recruiter that can contact the firm, ask the right questions and see if there might be a need for someone like you--this works. I run a good subspecialty of my business doing this and have for over twenty years.

[Legal placement](#) is a niche business that caters to a relatively small subset of the legal community. Like any business, legal placement is constrained by the business realities of the marketplace, but is not the same as legal recruiting. Read [What Happens When You Work with a BCG Attorney Search Legal Placement Professional?](#)

Please review some case studies I have done for placements of senior level attorneys here as well:  
[A Senior Contract Environmental Attorney from the Midwest Moves Gets Multiple Interviews in Seattle and Accepts a Position With a Top Law Firm](#)  
[Senior Real Estate Attorney Doing a Nationwide Search Finds a Great Job in California](#)

## Conclusions

Most partners without business manage to find something else to do on their own. The biggest mistake you can make, though, is sending your passion towards something you do not enjoy or are not enthusiastic about. Partners that have business often have the business because they are enthusiastic about what they are doing, or have not found an environment to be passionate about this. If you are passionate then potential clients will pick up on this and want you to help them with their matters. If you are passionate, other attorneys will want you to work for their clients. If you are passionate, you will work hard and work harder.

You need to have an infectious passion for what you are doing if you want to do more than just coast in your career. This passion needs to be directed towards a job that makes you happy. Whether you are in the wrong law firm environment, should be working for the government, in-house, or elsewhere, you need to understand the sort of job that will make you the happiest and most fulfilled. It may not be practicing law at all. You can and will find success, though, when you direct your passion towards something that you enjoy. Partners with business have it because they have an enthusiasm for what they are doing.

## Share Your Thoughts

*Ex: Are you stuck at a firm that doesn't encourage business development? Are you not gaining the experience you hoped for? Did you [learn what your options are](#)? Why or why not?*

*Two of the most common complaints that recruiters hear on a regular basis are as follows:*

*One, you aren't getting the hands-on litigation experience that you were hoping to get.*

*Two, the partners or the firm discourage or don't actively encourage associates to build a book of business.*

*Did this happen to you while practicing in a law firm?*

[Share your responses to these questions and your thoughts about how to be a happy attorney in the comments below.](#)

