

## *Junior Associates with Extraordinary Credentials Don't Necessarily Need Law Firm Experience*

All law firms want to hire litigators with top, top credentials. All of them, even mid-sized and smaller law firms. Litigation is one of the most credentials conscious practice areas, period. There are a lot of litigators out there in the job market, but not all of them meet firm expectations. Firms want to hire litigators who went to [top law schools](#), did well at those schools, were active in student organizations that taught trial advocacy skills (moot court, mock trial, student attorney clinics), participated in law review, and preferably had a clerkship after law school. Lateral candidates who meet these criteria are hard to find and competition to hire them is fierce.

Generally speaking, firms also want to hire lateral candidates who have law firm experience, either during law school or after graduating (if the candidate didn't go the clerkship route). There are some exceptions to this rule, but the candidate needs a good story to explain why they have no law firm experience. For example, a candidate may have spent both summers interning for judges because they knew they wanted to clerk after law school and thought it would give them a competitive advantage and/or great reference for clerkship applications. Or, the candidate decided to study for an additional degree, and spent their summers taking courses in another academic program.

Here, the candidate's experience checked all the boxes except one. He'd gone to a Top 10 law school, participated in all the right activities, and summered at an Am Law firm, receiving an offer to join the firm after law school graduation. However, this candidate wanted to get trial experience quickly after graduating from law school. On the advice of a law school professor, he applied for a position with the Attorney General's Honors Program, which is recognized as the premier entry level recruitment program for government attorneys. This program is as or more selective than hiring at top law firms. And it promises attorneys early hands-on litigation experience that they may not receive at a major law firm.

This candidate loved working as a government attorney but always knew he eventually wanted to join a law firm. His commitment to the honors program was for two years. However, due to a family illness he decided to leave the program early and move home to be closer to family. This candidate had extraordinary credentials, so we decided to reach out to all the top law firms in his desired location, even firms that did not have current job openings. One of these firms recognized this candidate's potential and interviewed him as soon as possible. They met an exceptionally driven junior litigator with an outstanding educational and professional background. On top of that, he was a great personality fit for the firm who had a long-term commitment to the practice of law. They made him an above market offer and helped him relocate as soon as he finished his on-going projects for the honors program. He has enjoyed his experience since joining the firm and continues to grow as an attorney.

A few of take-aways from this case study: 1) Law firms want to hire litigators with top credentials so associates should do whatever they can to strengthen their resumes, both in law school and after graduating; 2) Law firms will consider government attorneys, if they are in a prestigious role and have not worked for the government too long. Generally, if candidates want to make a lateral move to a law firm, they should only work for the government for a couple of years; 3) Firms prefer lateral candidates who have a compelling reason for making a move, and a relocation to be closer to family is a great reason to seek a new job.

This search demonstrates that law firm partners jump at the chance to hire associates with top credentials, even when they take a non-traditional career path.