

Laid-off Class of 2019 Tech Transactions Associate Placed at Top Am Law 100 Firm in Seattle

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have noticed that niche practice areas are doing particularly well. Examples of niche practice areas that are very active right now are bankruptcy and restructuring, tax, trusts & estates, tech transactions and data privacy. In addition, smaller markets are doing well, and a candidate with real ties to a smaller market, such as Seattle, Portland, Phoenix, Las Vegas and Honolulu, is likelier to get traction than a candidate searching in a larger market. If you are a candidate who is both in a niche practice area and in a smaller market, then you've probably struck gold! This was certainly the case with the candidate that I just placed, and it turned out to be an incredible placement on many levels.

In terms of the candidate's background, she attended a Top 50 law school and did very well there -she was summa cum laude and Order of the Coif, and earned a 3.9 GPA! She was also on her law school journal, was on the Dean's List every semester, participated in Moot Court, was the President of her school's Women's Law Association and boasted several other academic and extracurricular accolades. She also attended a Top 50 undergraduate university, was magna cum laude there and studied abroad at a prestigious university in England. So, all in all, her academics were exceptional. In terms of her law firm experience, she spent her 2L summer at a prestigious national firm in Phoenix, and received an offer to join the firm post-graduation from law school.

However, her offer was in litigation, and she really wanted to do tech transactions, so she applied to firms on her own as a 3L and landed at a well-respected boutique in Seattle doing Tech, Video Games & Emerging Media. She actually started working at this boutique firm part-time as a 3L, in January 2019, so she has more experience than the average tech transactions first year.

The main challenge for us was, of course, that this candidate was very junior when we started working together. I started submitting her in February 2020, when she had only been at her firm post-graduation for a few months. However, I was hoping that the fact that she had been working for them since January 2019 would help us. We submitted her to firms in SF, Silicon Valley, LA, the OC, San Diego, Phoenix and Las Vegas. She had ties to Phoenix and Las Vegas, as she spent her 2L summer in Phoenix and her 1L summer in Las Vegas, and told me that she had friends throughout California. I knew that California was likely a stretch, as this candidate doesn't have family anywhere in California and she's so junior. The fact that she doesn't have the California bar actually doesn't matter in this case, as I've noticed that California firms will make an exception to the general CA license requirement for candidates from hot and niche practice areas like tech transactions and data privacy. However, it would have helped if she had had a year or two more of post-law school experience, as the vast majority of firms searching for tech transactions Associates in California were and are looking for at least a few years of experience.

The situation became even tougher when this candidate was laid off from her boutique firm in Seattle in June. When she told me this, I really and truly believed that that was the end of the line for us. I've been working with several laid-off 2019ers during this pandemic, and before this candidate, none of them had gotten any traction. The sad truth of the matter is that a 2019er who is laid off right now will likely land at a low-level firm and / or will have to switch practice areas. However, I did see one opening at an Am Law 100 firm in Seattle that was looking for a mid-level tech transactions Associate. I knew that this candidate was too junior for the role but I thought, heck, why not try.

A week or two after I submitted her, the firm reached out asking to interview. It turned out that while she was indeed too junior for the role, they were in the process of getting a first or second year tech transactions Associate position approved by the firm and posted on the firm website. During the interview, they actually

told the candidate that they'd want to post the position and get more resumes before deciding whether or not to move forward with her, which is usually a ding. But, they liked my candidate so much and the candidate came off so well in the interview, that the firm decided NOT to post the position on their website and just move forward with her! She went through two rounds of video interviews, one with partners and one with associates, and then a conflicts and background screening, and was extended an offer! Neither she nor I could believe it. As mentioned, this is a top Am Law 100 firm, and not only are Am Law 100 firms barely interviewing during the pandemic, but they are certainly (for the most part) not seriously considering or interviewing candidates that have been laid off, let alone 2019 candidates who have been laid off! This would have been a huge upwards move for her and the dream opportunity in any market, and even if she had still been at her firm. Needless to say, we were both absolutely over the moon. This firm, like many Am Law 100 firms, has recently cut its associate salaries by 15%, and so the base is lower than what we were expecting, but she may get bumped up to a higher base in September and of course it's not all about the money! This opportunity is the dream opportunity for this candidate in the tech transactions space, and is quite literally a career and life changer. I could not be any happier for her!