

Big Law Litigator with Top Academic Credentials Placed at Litigation Boutique in LA

It's tough to be a Big Law general litigator in a major market looking for a job right now. In fact, it's always a little tough to be a Big Law general litigator, especially as the attorney gets more senior. Unfortunately, Big Law firms are often not looking to hire mid-level and especially senior litigators who don't come with business, and this is of course the case for the majority of Big Law litigators, as they've been billing for the firm's huge clients and on its huge matters and haven't had the time or opportunity to develop their own business. I've noticed that it's particularly hard for Big Law (and really, all types of general litigators) to get traction right now, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The practice areas that are doing the best are niche practice areas, such as bankruptcy and restructuring, tax, trusts & estates, technology transactions, data privacy, etc. General litigators are a dime a dozen, and firms just don't seem eager to hire general litigators when a lot of the courts remain closed and so many trials have been delayed.

The candidate that I placed is exceptional under normal circumstances, even despite being a general litigator. She is Class of 2015, at a top Big Law firm in LA and has been with the firm since her 1L summer (she spent her 1L summer and her 2L summer at this firm!), has high-level, general complex and commercial litigation experience, went to a top five law school and a very prestigious undergraduate school as well, is diverse, is a woman and speaks Spanish at a professionally proficient level. Her resume literally glows with prestige. She also did a law school externship with the US Attorney's Office (a well-regarded externship for law school students), and has several top grades on her law school transcript. I think that the only negatives with this candidate were that she hasn't ever taken or defended a deposition, she wasn't top of her class in law school and received one lower grade (although, as mentioned, she did receive many high marks) and she is, of course, a mid-level to somewhat senior general litigator who was searching for a job during a pandemic. Unbeknownst to the firms that we applied her to, she was also being laid off by her Big Law firm, although they did say that they would give her at least six months to find another job. So this added a sense of urgency to her search.

What this candidate did right was that she allowed me to apply her to all kind of firms in the LA area and even in the OC as well, even though she really wanted to stay in LA. We applied her to Big Law firms, mid-sized firms and boutiques, even more specialized boutiques that did real estate and labor & employment. We cast a very wide net. What she told me was that she either wanted to go to another Big Law firm that paid market or close to market, or a boutique where she could get a lot more substantive, hands-on pre-litigation experience. In a sense, she was looking for the unicorn opportunity with regard to boutiques - she wanted a place with a good work life balance and low billables requirement but that also paid market or close to market. Of course, these opportunities don't really exist. If a boutique pays market or close to market, they will expect you to work hard and bill a lot. If the hours are more reasonable and there is a good work life balance, of course the boutique will pay nowhere near market.

We ended up getting her a few interviews, all at litigation boutiques. Two of the firms were not actively hiring at the moment, but wanted me to keep them in the loop, and check-in with them in a month or two to see what their needs looked like then. The third boutique, the one that ended up hiring her, did have an active need, and the process moved very quickly with them, because they liked my candidate so much. After just one Zoom interview with the two lead partners, my candidate was extended an offer that very same day. The firm wanted an answer within 24 hours, but I convinced them to give her four days, and then I actually got her another one week extension, while she was interviewing with a mid-sized firm that paid close to market. Normally, a firm would not agree to an extension, let alone two extensions on an offer! But the firm loved her so much and were so eager to have her join that they kept giving us extensions, and indeed even increased the base salary offered and decreased the billable hours requirement to make their offer more enticing! In the

end, the mid-sized firm couldn't move fast enough for my candidate, and my candidate liked the attorneys at my boutique firm more. While this firm doesn't pay great, especially compared to what she makes now, it seems to be a tight-knit family where she will get great mentorship and a lot of the substantive pre-litigation experience that she's been looking for. This candidate is leaving her Big Law firm and starting at the boutique litigation firm in just a few short weeks, and while she is nervous for the change, she is also very excited. I am excited to hear about all of the cases she works on and all of the experience she gets at her new firm!