

# *Why You Should Never Give Up Your Law Firm Job Search: Lessons in Law Firm Job Search from an Abandoned Bangkok Street Puppy, Two Attorney Crystal Meth Addicts and an Attorney Computer Repairman*

*By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director*

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**Giving up your search is the most serious mistake you can make.**

**Many people are not reaching their potential and unhappy because they gave up.**

**Over 95% of the business of law is going on outside of the largest law firms and all over.**

**Those 95% of law firms will hire you if you persist with your search.**

When I was sixteen years old, I lived in Bangkok, Thailand, in a twelve-story building. The building was spacious, with one apartment per floor, and was occupied exclusively by ex-pats. One Saturday afternoon, I came downstairs to the lobby of the apartment. I saw a few guards playing with a small street puppy outside. The puppy was trying to make friends with them, so I went up to the puppy and started playing with him too. Then, I took him up into my apartment and tried to give him some milk. The puppy was so excited to be in my apartment that he was not eating and wanted to kiss me and get close to me. He thought I was adopting him. After an hour or two inside my apartment playing with him, my stepmother made me put him outside and back with the guards. When I left, he looked distraught.

On Monday morning, when I went to school, the puppy was waiting for me outside. He ran up to me and tried to follow me to school, but the guards kept the puppy and did not let him follow me. When I came home from school, the puppy was waiting as well, and when he tried to follow me to the elevator, the guards help him back again. He continued doing this for a few days until he finally realized he was not coming with me. A day or so later, I noticed another family getting friendly with the puppy. They started to play with him, and the puppy started playing with them too.

After a week of the puppy playing with everyone in the building, management told the guards the puppy was no longer allowed in the complex. For weeks, the puppy stood outside the gates, and the guards, myself, and the other family would bring him milk, food and spend time with him. However, gradually, we all started to forget about him.

As the weeks went by, the puppy grew larger, started to appear dirty, and looked more like a street dog. I tried to say hello, but he would hardly acknowledge me. The puppy stopped spending as much time around the gate. After a few months of not seeing the puppy, I tried to say hello, and he growled and showed his teeth at me. The guards said he was no longer friendly to them either. The few times I saw him after that, he was scratched and looked like he had been fighting. It was no longer the same puppy by any means, and he had turned into a street dog.

I knew that if I had invited him into my apartment, raised him, and given him a home, he would have been a happy and domesticated dog. That devastated me. However, this was never allowed. People said he was a "street dog" and had worms or diseases. I heard all sorts of excuses of why we could not adopt him--we lived in the United States and never would be able to bring him home, we lived in an apartment, and he would go to the bathroom everywhere, it was not safe to adopt a dog like that because he could grow up vicious--on

and on. No matter how much I may have wanted to adopt the dog, I was not permitted to do so.

The dog did not have a great life. He lived on the street and foraged for food. He was shunned from people and looked down on as a pest. He became angry, was probably hit, and was chased away by people as he grew. He fought with other dogs. He was rail-thin because there was never enough food. When he got sick or hurt, there was no one to take care of him. He had to worry about getting hit by cars, motorcycles, and trucks in the street. At night he needed to find a quiet, dry place to sleep. I am sure life was not pleasant for that dog as he grew up. He likely did not live a long life, either. Maybe he was caught by a dog catcher and put down at some point. I never found out.

That puppy was something I always felt a bit bad about and guilty for. Perhaps I could have provided a home if I had fought for him--I do not know. I do know that when we have a home and someone who wants us, we will always be far better off than when we do not. Having people we can love and take care of, having employers we can contribute to, and having a purpose beyond ourselves makes all the difference in the world to our happiness. When we do not have this, we are often angry and lost.

There was no reason the puppy could not have found a happy home. The reason he did not was random. He tried to find a home at the apartment. Unfortunately, this was the wrong choice. It was a twelve unit apartment building filled exclusively with foreigners. It was an apartment that would not allow street dogs to roam its parking lot. It was not the right place. If the puppy had been knocking on a different door, his life and outlook would have differed. If he had given up on the apartment and tried to find others to take care of him, he likely would have succeeded.

However, the puppy did not keep trying. Instead, he became bitter, angry, and gave up. People take in street dogs all the time--all over the world. Especially as puppies. How much sense does it make to stop trying and, instead, become bitter and angry about everything? There is always someone out there who will take in a street dog. The problem is that they get bitter, angry, and sad. They give up.

I could tell from the puppy's body language when he started to give up. He was no longer as excited to run up to me. He would be sulking outside the apartment gates and not get up to greet me. He was sad. He went through several different emotions as all of this unfolded, and he started to realize he would not have a home.

**First, he tried harder to meet new people and did not give up on something happening with the people he had already met.** He tried to get close to me, and when that was not working, he did not give up but did the same with others in the building and the guards.

**Second, he stopped trying as hard and became sad.** When he saw that things were not working for him as he wanted, he became sad. He did not know what he had done wrong and felt terrible. Instead of trying to stay happy and enthusiastic, he started to give up and did not feel as excited anymore.

**Third, he stopped trying completely and became angry.** Instead of being sad, he became mad at the world. He had given all of himself and his love and tried as hard as possible to be loved. When it did not work for him, he became angry at the people he had formerly wanted to love him for rejecting him.

The need to contribute--to someone or something--and find acceptance occurs not just with animals. It happens with attorneys seeking jobs, too. The need to find a match--people you can work with--is among the most significant needs.

When you think about this puppy, he is no different from a child who does not find acceptance in school and does not perform well there. He underperforms academically, gets in with the wrong kids, and pretty soon

stops trying. He may get into crime or other trouble. This happens to too many people. They feel rejected, so they rebel--and their lives go in a different direction.

When I began my career in the legal placement business, I quickly noticed there was a type of attorney who had difficulty finding a legal position. Young attorneys and older attorneys all want homes, and the vast majority *need* to find people who will take them in and give them work to do, a paycheck, and a place to call home. Every attorney wants this--from the most successful to the lowest earners. Everyone wants a home and place to give them an identity, a paycheck, and a group.

When an attorney cannot find a job or loses a job, they often wonder why they are not getting the sort of acceptance their peers are getting. They may apply to numerous places and get a cold reception and wonder why. They try and do all they can to get a position, but despite everything, the world does not open up as quickly as they want it to or does not open up at all.

Early in my career, I would call attorneys I knew were having a difficult time finding a position, inviting them to my office, or even flying them out to see me on numerous occasions. [Many of these attorneys attended Ivy League law schools](#). They were just not getting interviews, or if they were getting interviews, they were not doing well in these interviews. All wanted homes and people to take them in.

Most who were having issues getting positions were like the puppy--they were sad and no longer enthusiastic about getting jobs because they experienced too much rejection.

**See also:**

[Never Stop Improving](#)

[Your Strength Is Your Ability to Control Your Internal World](#)

In some cases, when I would meet these attorneys, I would find things about them that might turn off law firms.

## **Some of the reasons these attorneys were not getting jobs:**

### **1. Lack of self-confidence.**

[Their lack of confidence](#) came across to such a degree that I knew it would turn off firms. Law firms and people that hire attorneys want attorneys to come across as confident because this is what clients need. If an attorney cannot hold their own, then this is a problem. However, this is quite rare. In most cases, a lack of self-confidence is due to not being able to find a position--that is often fixable.

### **2. Some were extremely nerdy.**

However, in the legal profession, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Law firms like smart people and clients do too. If someone is nerdy enough and intelligent enough, law firms and most legal employers can always use them. This is not an impediment, no matter how nerdy you might be, I would say it matters but not that much.

### **3. Some came across as interested in other things.**

Their resumes simply did not say law firm attorney. Their resumes looked like they wanted to operate a business, fight for the rights of crime victims, or something else. If your resume does not look like you want to be there, you probably do not--and law firms will not hire you.

### **4. Some looked like they could be bad hires.**

There was something in their background that was not positive--they had been fired for something bad that other attorneys in the legal community knew about. Still, other attorneys had all sorts of polarizing political views that were coming through on their resume that could turn employers off. They did not look like safe

hires.

## 5. Others were unprepared to speak with law firms.

They would say the wrong thing in cover letters and interviews. They did not answer questions correctly. They assumed law firms were looking for the wrong things and gave the wrong answers. They were just too [socially awkward in interviews](#) and did not do well.

Despite these negativities, I could fix and work with them. Attorneys are smart and can adjust the issues holling them back--almost always.

There were a few rare cases where I met attorneys who were 100% [not suited to practicing law](#)--and because I felt so bad for them, I ended up hiring them.

One attorney was a brilliant [Columbia Law School](#) graduate. He had never gotten a position as a summer associate in a law firm and had done well in law school. I saw his resume come across my desk one fall in 2000 and felt terrible that he was unemployed.

He was very nerdy, interested in fixing and building computers, and wanted to be a corporate attorney--and only a corporate attorney. Unfortunately, in late October of 2000 the corporate market had completely imploded in California due to the dot com explosion. Not only were corporate attorneys all over California losing their jobs at a rate that exceeded anything that had ever happened in history, even first-year corporate associates in law firms with only a month or so of experience were being let go in droves.

I explained to this young attorney that if he wanted a position, he would have to look for something doing litigation or another practice area. Preferably he would have to look all over California and not just in Los Angeles to increase his chances. He informed me that he went to Columbia Law School and did well there, was qualified to work in a large law firm, and would be extremely unhappy practicing litigation. He also said that his parents were in Los Angeles; he had grown up there and had an apartment and did not want to look or work elsewhere.

I took a liking to him and told him that a law firm would not hire him through a legal recruiter and, instead, helped him prepare applications for large law firms - and even got him to include some medium firms. All in all, he ended up applying to maybe two hundred firms in Los Angeles. I knew this was unlikely to go anywhere because he competed with thousands of corporate attorneys. They had been let go from large law firms. Nevertheless, this is what he wanted, and so I let him do it.

While working on his applications and waiting for responses, I invited him to work in my office, on a desk right behind me. I talked to him all day and encouraged him and paid him maybe \$25/hour or so to do research. As the days went by after him sending out applications, he became increasingly nervous. No positive responses were coming in. But because he sat in my office with me, I believe he was encouraged that there was nothing wrong with him. He was hearing me talk to people losing their jobs as corporate attorneys all day long. I tried to help him to look at other markets and practice areas, but he knew what he wanted and refused to budge.

At the time, there were many other attorneys like him, and I started a business to help them do mass mailings to law firms. The company grew, and he started helping us around the office by setting up computers, setting up printers, helping us work with large data sets, and, eventually, started showing an interest in programming and had a natural affinity for this started doing this as well. [Because there was so much demand for people to program computers and do other associated work](#), within a year or so, he made over \$120,000 a year doing this sort of work for me.

However, he was not happy. He knew that I had hired him out of sympathy and given him the work I did because I wanted to help him and felt sorry for him. Despite having the opportunity I gave him, he still wanted to work in a law firm. I encouraged him on several occasions to keep applying to law firms, but he refused. He thought that one round of rejections from a mass mailing was too much. By 2002, the corporate market was back, and he could have kept applying places, but he had given up.

While he was working for me, a part of him desperately wanted to be attached to law firms. He started moonlighting building computers for law firms and programming their computer systems. Pretty soon, he stopped showing up to my office on time. At first, he would be in the office late at noon. Then he started arriving at 2:00 and pretty soon it was at 5:00 pm. There were repeated warnings and attempts to get him to come in at a regular hour, but he could not do it. He wanted a connection with a law firm and had rebelled against a good job that I provided him. I understand in retrospect that he also wanted to prove to me that he did not need my help. I ended up having to let him go.

By the time I let him go, he was not happy. However, even before that, when he realized he would not have a home with a law firm, he increasingly started going downhill - I could see it in his face and mannerisms. He just was not himself. When he started working for me, he used to come into the office in cheap suits that he looked like he bought from Sears--which was nevertheless endearing. Then he started to come in looking less and less put together. He started letting himself go and did not dress or look as good. He became too thin. His skin broke out. He was nervous.

What made me the saddest when he worked for me was on a few occasions, I gave him some legal work to do. He did an excellent job with this legal work and tried hard. I did not have ongoing legal work to provide him with at the time, though. It made me so sad that I knew that it would probably be the only time someone gave him legal work to do. A few times after I gave him his last assignment, he asked for more legal work - but I did not have anything else to do.

At the same time, there were other people I brought into my office to do mailings. One of them was a girl from Los Angeles who had gone to [Boston University](#) for law school and had not been a summer associate. She was willing to work all over Los Angeles, and I also helped her do a large mailing. While she was waiting for a positive response from the mailing, I also invited her into the office. She, too, did not get a positive response initially, and when I tried to get her to look at other markets, she refused. I became friends with her and realized early that she was distraught not having a position or being able to find one.

I gave her a few legal assignments, and she did them very professionally. She seemed to have so much pride doing legal work, and I felt bad. I did not have more work for her to do. The only work I had for her was talking on the phone to job seekers and finding places to apply. She was very good at this. She would also have been an excellent lawyer. She just did not want to face all of the rejection that came along with looking for a job.

She began an affair with an engaged man in our office and was rebuffed after this had gone on for some time. She wanted to be loved and became interested in me and started sending me flirtatious messages at the office. On one occasion, she showed up at the front door to my house on a Saturday night after an office party. She knew one of my best friends and told him she was in love with me--despite the fact we did not have a relationship. Then she tried to sleep with my best friend and offered to have sex with him in his car in the driveway of her house when he dropped her off one evening after an event.

She became unhappy, and when we would go out as a group would drink far too much. One time she punched a security guard in the Standard Hotel's lobby in downtown Los Angeles and almost went to jail when the police were called. Because she was so much trouble, I stopped associating with her and only dealt with her professionally. Despite all this, she was doing well in her job and making over \$100,000 a



year.

Eventually, she started using crystal meth, from what I understood, and this led to all sorts of problems. When she was coming off the drug, she would often sleep so much she would miss work and be extremely lazy when working. She started dating a tattooed Latin gang member who started sitting in our lobby during the workday to ensure she was behaving herself at work. When he was told he could no longer do this, he started standing outside our office building, glaring at our employees as they came and went. When I found out about the drug use and that this was impacting her job, I immediately had her supervisor let her go. When she was let go, her Latin boyfriend became a threat and started threatening employees of my company that he thought had slept with her in the past - and even tracked down my friend.

From what I understand, her parents put her in rehab, and she eventually got better.

Today she is a freelance make-up artist.

The other guy runs a computer repair business out of his apartment in Los Angeles and works alone.

Each of these people reminded me of the puppy I had seen when I was younger, who had been unable to find a home and, unable to do so, had been unhappy. Today, both of these people do not have work homes and work independently. They are afraid to rely on other people, perhaps, and need independence.

First, they were eager to find a home and enthusiastic about their futures. They wanted a legal family to take care of them and someone to help them and vice versa.

Second, they became sad they were unable to find a job. Both let themselves go, started acting inappropriately, and sabotaged whatever success they were having with me.

Third, they became angry. One started using drugs and lashed out and became promiscuous. She got a dangerous boyfriend who threatened everyone around her and stuck up for her--she projected the anger she felt at the world.

The other stopped doing his job and felt more secure and happier helping law firms with computers than working for me. He wanted to prove he could be successful and independent on his own

#### See also:

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

[15 Reasons You Should Not Quit The Practice Of Law](#)

[Lawyer Depression and Anxiety: Why Most Lawyers are Depressed and Anxious Due to Practicing Law](#)

Incredibly, she was not the first woman I had taken in who got an angry Latin boyfriend. Another girl who went to [Harvard Law School](#) and I placed at [Skadden Arps](#) in Los Angeles lost her job there, and I tried to help her find another job. However, she gave up on finding a job after only applying to less than ten firms and getting rejected. She believed her qualifications merited her working in a major law firm. If this did not happen for her, then she refused anything less.

She was going through a divorce, unhappy, and had all sorts of issues, and I was unable to help her land on her feet. Someone close to her called me and told me she was using drugs. She stopped by my office periodically, and I tried to help her with her resume and cover letters--but she was too far gone. Drug use had taken its toll on her, and her hair was matted, her teeth were stained, and she had pockmarks all over her skin, and she did not smell good. She spoke too fast about stuff that sounded like complete nonsense. One of the last times I saw her, she brought an angry, tattooed Latin boyfriend with tattooed biceps the size of my

thighs into the office. She was glaring at everyone and he was equally menacing. Unable to find acceptance in the legal world, she had gone off the deep end, and now had someone close to her that reflected her anger towards the world.

She, too, eventually went to rehab and is now better.

What happened to each of these people is a story that keeps repeating itself, and I see it repeatedly in my career. The puppy and each of these people made a mistake that attorneys make every day in their careers: [They mistake initial rejection for their futures.](#)

In the case of the guy who graduated from Columbia Law School, giving up was a huge mistake. During the summer after his second year of law school, he had worked for a large corporation in their tax department and enjoyed it a great deal. While they did not have a permanent job after graduation, he had good experience, liked the work, and did well there. If he liked tax law, he could have gone on and gotten an LLM in tax law. He should have applied to firms all over California and should have been more flexible in his practice area. If he had tried to do a different practice area and kept applying, he would have been able to find a position. He should never have given up.

Today, he is not an active member of the bar and is not practicing law. He went to Columbia Law School, did well there, and was smart. He is not employed as an attorney because he gave up. [He became angry that he was rejected](#) and is not having the life he could have.

The girl who went to Boston University Law School also gave up. After sending out a bunch of letters, she received initial rejections and stopped applying places when doors did not open. She was attractive, had a great personality, was smart, and could have done very well as an attorney - but she too quit and gave up. She became angry and sad and lashed out.

The girl who went to Harvard Law School and then Skadden also went off the deep end when she lost a position and did not find acceptance. She gave up and set her standards very high and gave up.

I would be lying if I said that I had not seen this sort of thing more times - in fact, during my first several years in the placement business, I saw it numerous times. I have more stories than I can count. Some attorneys cannot get jobs out of law school and give up. Some attorneys lose jobs and then give up.

**See also:**

[The Top 17 Reasons Law Firms Do Not Hire and Make Offers to Attorneys and Law Students: It's Not What You Think](#)

[The Fear of Rejection and Your Career](#)

[How Lawyers Can Cope With Rejection In Interviews](#)

One attorney I hired and tried to help was one of the youngest graduates in history from [the University of California-Berkeley Law School](#). He also had a breakdown of sorts when he could not get hired. I tried to help him find a position, and when he could not, I hired him. After persistent demands, I paid him the same salary attorneys were making in the largest law firms.

However, instead of appreciating what I was doing for him, he decided that he was not working for a law firm and could leave at 5:00 every day (he was [in-house](#) after all) and made other mistakes that undermined the company. When I let him go, he started an online campaign against me, posting all sorts of negative comments online. Then, he resigned from the bar and started traveling the world and living in third-world beach communities. He also went through the stages of job search of (1) enthusiasm, (2) sadness, and then (3) anger.

When I represent a candidate in a search for a legal position, I do everything to get them a job. I search every opening for them I can find in the market each week and send all appropriate openings. I also do extensive research for places the attorney could work even if there are no positions available for them. The research is exhausting.

In addition to a [team of over 100 people researching opening for BCG Attorney Search](#) and my companies, I also spent more than half my time doing research alone. Spending 30+ hours a week contacting firms, doing research, and staring at information on a computer screen is exhausting. I have been doing this for 20+ years and enjoy it, but it is tiring and tedious work. I drink a lot of coffee, take all sorts of vitamins and associated things to stay alert, and am always working in front of my computer doing research.

Because I cannot help everyone, I also refer my candidates to the site I started in 2003 called [LawCrossing](#). This site shows all of the legal market positions--including most of the ones I am recruiting for at [BCG Attorney Search](#)--so people can continue applying for and finding jobs if my recruiters or I cannot help them. Unlike Indeed or any other site out there, this site researches and shows every single position in the legal market and does not just show jobs employers pay to post there. This means people have less competition for the jobs on the site, and they are paying for first-rate research.

I am also pushing the people around me to do this research and the placement of people who work here. I train them, write about it and train some more. It is important to find places for people to work because I have seen what happens when people do not find places to work. It never ends well, and people become unhappy, give up, and get angry.

Despite all the work--research, sending my candidates jobs, and suggesting places for them to apply, several times a week--people drop out. They email, text me or notify me through our BCG Attorney Search app to stop sending them jobs. I send reports to candidates each week, and many get discouraged that they are not getting positions and interest immediately. They give up. It is incredible how many people give up when they do not get excellent and immediate reception from the market. [Good attorneys give up](#) every day, and it is so sad.

One attorney I was working with not too long ago is an [entertainment attorney](#) with well over \$1,000,000 in business. However, when the virus hit all of his work stopped. He had gone to a top law school and done well there. He spent over 15 years cultivating all sorts of relationships and business in the entertainment industry. However, six months with no work was too much for him, and he gave up. Rather than be fired, he quit his job. He set up a solo practice with no clients. Now he is nervous and upset and letting himself go. [He is having issues in his marriage--like everyone does when this stuff happens](#). He is upset, frightened, and angry. He has stopped looking for a job and is not doing well.

Attorneys give up on their job searches because they do not like rejection. They feel if they are being rejected, there is something wrong with them - or there is something wrong with their recruiter. Many attorneys do not understand that rejection is par for the course in any job search - it is just what happens. People are not rejecting you explicitly, though. They are making business decisions, and at the time and place where you are, you are just not the best business decision there is.

When I was in law school, my girlfriend's mother wanted us to settle down and live in a suburb called Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, so that we could be close to her. She was very wealthy and had a few law firms around the area that represented her. She was also somewhat active in politics and knew attorneys through that work. She introduced me to a few attorneys in the market. All indicated that if I moved to Camp Hill, they would be willing to offer me positions because not many people tried to work in Camp Hill, much less from top law schools who had done well there.



Camp Hill was not New York, Chicago, or even Detroit - but there were positions there. I was in law school during a [bad recession](#), and there were not many jobs, but I could have gotten a job. At the time, I was most interested in working in Detroit, and that market was downright hostile. The auto industry was in very bad shape, and there were not a lot of jobs. New York was also in a bad recession and challenging to get work in--even coming out of a top law school. However, if I had wanted to, I could have had several jobs in Camp Hill. Despite having applied to hundreds of law firms in New York, Detroit, and Chicago, I never felt like I was getting a very warm reception. In Camp Hill, however, I felt very welcome.

There are always jobs out there. Most people just do not look hard enough. Most people give up. If you want to work as an attorney, the saddest thing you can do is give up. When you give up, everything goes to hell. You get sad, and then you get angry. You are not getting a job, so you give up on your search.

The job market for many attorneys can be discouraging--in good, bad, and in-between economies. While most attorneys would like legal employers to be receptive and welcoming, this is not something that occurs for hardly any attorney. There are too many factors at work--it depends on your practice area, the area of the country you are looking at, and the current economy. It is based, in large part, on luck as well.

The puppy that did not find a home with me made the mistake of going after the wrong apartment complex. He chose a building with twelve apartments, all occupied by people from foreign countries that would not want to adopt a dog in Thailand and take it home. Had he set his sights on another building or a bunch of different apartments, he would have found a family to take care of him. Instead, he decided that he only wanted one thing, which ended up hurting him and led to him feeling and being rejected.

Just because you have great qualifications, experience, and other positive things to offer an employer, it does not mean that they all are going to be interested in you.. [In two-plus decades of working with attorneys with eight-figure books of business, former Supreme Court clerks and attorneys coming from the very best firms and law schools](#), I can honestly say that I had never seen an attorney get interviews with every firm they applied to when they applied to more than a few. In fact, for most attorneys, interviews are the exception rather than the rule.

I have made thousands of placements. I make placements almost every week of the year, and many weeks I make multiple placements. I also train people who make placements. Because of me, our [recruiters](#) place attorneys just about every day of the week and often place several on a single day. I like to think that I have a modest amount of understanding of this business. However, I will be the first to tell you that the firms most likely to be interested in you are often much more random than predictable--there is just too much going on to adequately predict what will happen to you and who is likely to be interested in you. I have hired data scientists to pore over data and look for correlations, spent millions of dollars researching the job market, and helped thousands of attorneys literally--and still believe the market is largely random.

#### **See also:**

[How to Choose a Recruiter That Is Right for You](#)

[Legal Recruiter Directory](#)

[Why Every Attorney Needs to Apply to a Lot of Places \(and Not Give Up\) When Rejected](#)

Most people whose job it is to get you a position will not tell you this. They want to tell you how special and marketable you are, about their connections and convince you they can place you. These are the recruiters that call you on the phone so you send your resume and they send you to a few law firms, and you never hear from them again--unless you get an interview.

Most law firms do not interview the majority of people who apply to them, and they hire even fewer of these

people. However, in a career doing this, I have seen that so many hiring, interviewing, and other personnel decisions are so utterly random that whatever you might want to believe, it is always going to be very difficult to know what is going to happen.

The only way to counteract the economy, or whatever negatives are in your background, is keep applying to law firms. You simply cannot give up. When you give up, everything stops. You are being rejected by law firms for economic reasons in most instances, and this is not something you can control. The only way to fight against economic conditions is to find a firm where the economics are in your favor.

Despite having done well at a respectable law school, the market in large cities and where I was from (Detroit) was not good when I was in law school. It was good for me in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, and it would have been much easier to get a position there. You can never give up. You need to look at more markets, different types of firms, and make the economics work for you - because they eventually will. They do for everyone--young, old, and in-between. Every attorney can get a good law firm job if they do not give up - but far too many do. They do each day, and I see it all the time. It does not have to be this way.

### **What is Not Random About the Job Market: How Large Law Firm Evaluate Attorneys (They Hire Laterally)**

The very best law firms that serve the largest corporate clients have certain hiring standards that are difficult to escape.

They prefer attorneys from the largest and best law firms and the best law schools who did the best in these schools.

They prefer to hire specialists.

They are most interested in people coming directly from law firms.

They do not like to hire people coming from other practice settings (in-house, the government).

They have lots of applicants for each job. Suppose there is anything in your background that is a little off (you are unemployed, in your forties when you graduated from law school, have strange political things in your experience, for example). In that case, they are unlikely to take a chance on you - but they might.

They typically only hire associates with 1 to 6 years of experience and will not hire outside this range.

If you are an associate, they prefer you do not look like a [job hopper](#) and look like you want to settle down at your next firm.

Large law firms prefer the most profitable practice areas. They have a disdain for most consumer-facing practice areas (family law, personal injury). In these practice areas, there is downward pressure on rates (employment law), or practice areas where clients want flat-fee arrangements (trust and estates and increasingly patent law).

They prefer to hire people from their "club" who have been summer associates and have experience in similar types of firms. They will rarely hire [first-year associates](#) who did not work summers in large law firms leading to job offers.

In recessions, they rarely hire [lateral corporate attorneys](#).

In the most significant cities, it is much more difficult to get hired than in branch offices in smaller markets.

When hiring partners lateraling from other law firms, they prefer to have large, seven-figure-plus books of business and rarely hire outside of this.

All of the attorneys I discussed in this article who had difficulties and left the law did not find positions with large law firms because there is microscopic randomness to what large law firms want.

The Columbia Law School graduate wanted to be a corporate attorney in a large law firm, in a recession--which was impossible. He was also not a summer associate in a top law firm. He was only looking in Los Angeles. If he looked at other markets in California and other practice areas, he would have succeeded. Who would not eventually hire a hungry, smart Columbia Law graduate?

The girl from Boston University Law School did not even work in a legal capacity after her first and second

years of law school. She did not do all that well in law school. However, she too was hung up on only working in Los Angeles and believed she would work in a large law firm. Had she broadened her search considerably, she would have found something.

The girl from Harvard and Skadden had been fired. She was unemployed, and this sent all sorts of danger signals to large law firms. Nevertheless, a [smaller to midsized firms](#) would have taken a chance on her and hired her all day. Who wouldn't want someone with those credentials?

The guy who graduated from a top law school at the age of 20 was never a summer associate, and his young age worked against him. Law firms were not willing to take a chance on his lack of maturity. Nevertheless, he could also have gotten a position with a smaller law firm if he applied himself.

## What is Random About the Job Market: How the Other 95% of Law Firms Hire Attorneys

You can predict, with some regularity, how the largest law firms will make hiring decisions. The way that large law firms hire attorneys is so predictable that most legal recruiting firms pride themselves on their ability to "exclude" any attorney that does not fit the mold of what large law firms are looking for. Most legal recruiters are snobs. They ask potential recruits all sorts of questions about themselves and decide whether the attorney is deserving of their time.

The snobbiest ones are often the least qualified and not attorneys at all. They take a lot of pride in their ability to separate the "wheat from the chaff" for various reasons. If you are too old, they do not like your law school grades, are unemployed, and more - they will not work with you. They have no patience for people that large law firms do not want.

If I and BCG Attorney Search were like the typical legal recruiter out there, we would not be swamped. However, I am proud to admit that I work with all sorts of attorneys. During recessions, much of the large law firm legal placement market shuts down completely. Our firm continues to do well. Large law firms are a small component of the legal market and constitute about 5% of it in terms of law firms and attorneys practicing out there.

Suppose you are trying to get attorneys jobs. In that case, it stands to reason that you should not be ignoring 95% of the legal market - but this is exactly what most recruiters do because it is all they understand. Instead of helping people get jobs who need their help, they concentrate on only helping people who do not need their help as much--the small percentage of attorneys with the qualifications that match what large law firms want.

The problem with all the attorneys I worked with who gave up was that they were going after a market that was likely to reject them because they did not have matching qualifications. They beat themselves up over this and felt terrible about it.

When I was in high school, I had an "in" of sorts to go to Harvard University. Several generations of my family went there, and I even had a contact in the admissions office. None of this is to say I was guaranteed to get admitted. Still, I was told in no uncertain terms that if I had certain grades and SAT scores and achievement test scores, I would have a good chance of getting in. I got the grades and SAT scores I needed, but showed up late for the achievement tests and knew I had not done well because of this. Since I had waited until the last test date to take the tests, I knew I could not take them again. There was some rule that I needed to get over 650 on each test. The first one I took when I was late, I got a 620 on. I did not fit the mold of what I needed and did not get in.

I was very upset about this for some time. During my first year at the University of Chicago, I applied to transfer to the school. I told them I wanted to major in some sociological discipline they offered that Chicago did not. Harvard called one of my professors and spoke about this. The professor told them they saw a need

to create this major in the school and that they would allow me to design my major at the university to study this. The professor called me into his office and told me that Harvard was going to admit me, but after the school designed a major for me, there was no longer a need. He told me the school would provide me private access to certain professors to do the major I wanted, allow me to take certain graduate-level classes I ordinarily would not be able to, and craft my own major. He explained to me it would be far better than what I would have gotten at Harvard.

He expected me to be happy, but I was actually stunned and taken aback--I was getting what I wanted, but not the way I wanted it. I stayed in Chicago and was happy. However, the lesson was that I kept trying and did not give up--and it almost worked! I ended up in a better place with more support--a place that did everything they could to accommodate my interests. Feeling sorry for yourself for not achieving a dream, or not getting in with a club you want to be part of, is not a good solution. If a club will not have you, who cares?

Law firms that serve smaller to midsized businesses and have lower billing rates than the largest law firms do not have the same rules as the largest law firms. The largest law firms outside of major markets do not have these rules either. It is only in the largest and most mature markets where the firms have the most reasons to exclude attorneys.

Most law firms care less about the factors that the largest law firms concern themselves with. The closer you get to law firms that serve consumers, the less likely law firms are to be concerned with them. The largest concern of the firms lowest on the food chain is the money you are willing to work for. The farther away you get from major markets, the easier it is to get hired. The more of a generalist you are willing to be, the easier it is to get hired.

None of this is to say it is always easy to get positions in smaller to mid-sized law firms, or in every market. You often need to look at lots of places over an extended period to find a place that is willing to hire you. Sometimes this means you look at just a few markets, and other times it means you look at many. However, you can always find something if you look hard enough.

A few years ago, a trust and estates attorney contacted me who had been a major law firm partner in Washington, DC, and lost his job. He had been looking for a new position for a few years and was furious that he could not find one. He was not a BCG Attorney Search client but had been applying to jobs for a few years and had not gotten any interviews. He was extremely angry and sent me some vitriolic messages about the legal market--the fact that I offered hope when there was none, and so forth.

I called him on the phone and spoke with him and spent at least 30 minutes calming him down. I told him that he needed to look at other markets. I told him that he needed to stop being so angry, and if he did, he would get a job. For the next few months, I sent him to at least 400 firms around the United States. I got him interviews in at least ten places--including North Dakota (which was booming with many newly wealthy people due to fracking in oil fields). He did not get the first several jobs he interviewed for because he was angry and would complain about why he lost his position in his previous firm, and then often would brag about how much money he had been making as a major firm partner--which turned off smaller law firms.

However, after several rejections, he started getting callbacks. He then eventually found a law firm that took him in. The law firm was on the opposite side of the country. His ability to learn from all of the rejection, readjust, come back for more help, and eventually listen to my advice helped him get a position. He is doing well there and has been there for several years.

This attorney was also angry and had almost given up. He was having family problems and emotional problems and not doing well when I met him. Everything changed because he kept pressing forward and did not give up--even after a few years of being unemployed. He looked far and wide and found something.

My concern for most attorneys is that they give up. [You do not need to quit. There is a home for you, but you need to keep trying.](#) I never got into Harvard and had no business going there because I did not meet their cutoff--but I did not give up. It almost worked when I tried again. Just because the largest law firms are not opening up for you does not mean they never will. Sometimes you are not ready for the best, and this is no reason to give up. Sometimes there are no opportunities in your market or your practice area, and that is no reason to give up. You need to protect your legal career and do everything you can not to give up.

I keep an interview spreadsheet on my desktop of all of the interviews of candidates I get each day. In more than 50% of the cases, I get interviews for my candidates and make placements at firms that do not even have openings. Each morning I also get a report of all of the interviews our recruiters had the previous day. These have similar numbers and bring similar surprises. The majority of interviews and placements we make are random and surprises--they are not just what you would suspect. While we place plenty of attorneys with the best qualifications, I can honestly say that the majority of placements are just ones I would not expect to happen. Someone sees something in a candidate that appeals to them and decides to bring them in for an interview and hire them.

In order to match candidates up most appropriately with law firms, we rank our candidates 1 to 5. A 5 candidate is someone at a major law firm, with top credentials generally who fits the mold of what the best firms are looking for. A 1 candidate is typically far removed from what the best law firms are looking for and often is doing consumer-related work. A 4 candidate is usually qualified to work in a major law firm. Still, something may be off in terms of their qualifications to work there.

The attorneys that get the most interviews are the 2s, and 3s--they get tons of interviews each day. These are the attorneys interested in 95% of the market that are not major law firms. While 5s always get interviews if the market is right, most of the activity in the market is at the 95% of law firms that are not the best.

The best law schools, the best colleges, and the best law firms comprise only a small percentage of the market. Over 95% of the business of law is going on outside of the largest law firms and all over. [Those 95% of law firms will hire you if you persist with your search. They hire when they have a business need.](#) (This means they believe they can make more money off you than they need to pay you to work there.) This is a simple equation and is precisely why you can always find a great job--even if you do not believe you can.

Giving up your search is the most serious mistake you can make. Many people are not reaching their potential and unhappy because they gave up. I believe in you. I believe in my candidates. Never stop trying and never give up. If you want to do this, you can--but you need to stay in the game.