

I was laid off during the pandemic from big law during my first five years of practice. Can I save my career?

By Becca Levine, Recruiter

We know many attorneys are going through a challenging time right now, having lost their jobs due to the pandemic, despite being star students at top law firms, and doing everything right in their career. The pandemic has caused layoffs to the youngest of associates- 1st years - and the most affected group tended to be attorneys in their first couple of years out of school.

We know this can be daunting and scary, and I was the first year associate myself during the 2008 financial crisis and watched many of my colleagues and friends suffer through difficult career setbacks. However, the good news is that the market seems to be stronger than the impact in 2008, where hiring did not happen for months to years in many practice areas. [Indeed, this is not to say that hiring is rampant and robust in big law](#); however, [we have seen many people land jobs during the pandemic](#), most through doing entirely virtual interviews via zoom or Skype. We have had some candidates receive offers from nothing more than multiple phone interviews.

We are also, not surprisingly, helping many attorneys who have been laid off to navigate the legal market. Your career is savable, and you can get back to the path you were on before. But there are specific strategies you should consider.

First, [the worst mistake attorneys make to assume the market is terrible and take themselves off the market](#). This should be when you are aggressively looking in the market - the layoffs by many firms are understandable now. Still, it will be harder for firms to be interested in someone the more prolonged the gap on their resume continues; you should be focusing on your job search as your full-time job.

Second, attorneys need to be broad and flexible with options. If a firm might not have been their first choice while they were an associate gainfully employed, they should seriously consider all options. This could mean targeting small and mid-sized firms, taking a pay cut while continuing to practice law, or being flexible on class year and other incentive issues.

Third, the location can be significant here. We have seen prominent law placements happening less in major cities like NYC and LA, and more in major more regional markets such as Charlotte, Seattle, and Boston. Moreover, to the extent the candidate has real flexibility and can move to more regional markets, we have seen hiring increasing in smaller markets, rather than decreasing, especially if the candidate is open to a smaller firm. Targeting only NYC will make the job search take longer than when targeting additional regions. The competitive nature of all the openings is ten-fold, given all the people on the market currently competing for the same position.

Fourth, this will be a hard time to get heard through a random resume submittal or sending a resume to a friend. Using a recruiter you trust can make a big difference here since recruiters can get the firm's attention, especially ones that the firms trust and know well. Moreover, recruiters will have access to more firms and more opportunities than you might find on your own. Many firms will see an end date on the resume and pass immediately, so having a person in your corner can make a huge difference in a job search today.

Finally, stay diligent and patient, and understand the process will take time. Many attorneys get frustrated if they do not get interest right away. Of course, we have attorneys who quickly land a job, and the process can be stress-free and fast. However, the reality of a market like this, with more supply of attorneys than jobs

available, is that the search will take longer. The firms are interviewing more people for fewer jobs, and the statistical likelihood of landing a position, therefore, goes down. It takes a broad, steady, and persistent approach, and if you do this, we do believe most people will land another job they are happy with.

We have placed many unemployed and laid-off attorneys since the pandemic started, and we continue to have many interviewing every week. We have also been amazed by these attorneys' resilience, facing an arduous path in their career, but sticking with it, being positive, and understanding the timing and competitiveness issues. We do not think a layoff during the pandemic is the death-knell in your career if you are smart about your job search, open to the market's realities, and thoughtful and broad in your strategy.