

Mid-level Labor & Employment and Employment Litigation Associate Lands at Boutique Firm in Santa Barbara

During the pandemic, from roughly mid-March to the present, we at BCG have seen a lot of movement at 1) smaller firms, 2) in niche practice areas and 3) in smaller markets. While mid-sized and Big Law firms are only moving forward with hiring for specific practice groups and specific clients with active needs, small firms, especially within the realm of litigation, continue to be interviewing, offering and hiring our candidates at an impressive rate. Although courts have been closed and trials have been delayed, they say that 90% of cases settle out of court, and of course Zoom has made virtual mediations, depositions, etc. possible. So we are seeing a lot of movement at small firms and in litigation. Small markets always do well, but seem to be doing particularly well right now.

For example, my most recent placements have been in Riverside, Seattle and now Santa Barbara. While Seattle is of course not a small market, it is certainly a lot smaller of a market than the Bay Area or LA, and I would qualify it as a small major market. My most recent placement was all three of these things - at a small, boutique litigation firm, in Labor & Employment / Employment Litigation, and in Santa Barbara. Labor & Employment / Employment is always a very hot practice area in California, and while it is not as niche as bankruptcy, tax or ERISA, it is still considered a specialty practice area, unlike general litigation.

In terms of this candidate's background, she attended a Top 20 law school and did fairly well there, graduating in 2015. She also attended a top public university for undergraduate, and graduated with a double major magna cum laude. She started her career at a small, boutique Labor & Employment firm in LA, and then after two years there, I helped her make an upwards lateral move to a national, multi-office, Labor & Employment firm with a strong presence in California. She was at this firm for about a year and three quarters, at which point both she and her husband (who is also a lawyer and a Big Law Associate) decided to leave their firms, take several months off, travel, enjoy life and relocate to Santa Barbara, where her husband is from and where his family lives. They plan on settling down there long-term. Now, I must say that this was somewhat of a risky move on both of their parts. I never recommend that a candidate leave his or her firm without having another opportunity or job lined up. While people can have all sorts of reasons for leaving their firm - a sick family member, being burned out and wanting to take a vacation, personal health or a toxic former work environment - this will almost always raise a big red flag in the minds of potential employers. You may have a perfectly justifiable reason for leaving your former firm, but prospective employers will usually assume the worst. Only in certain very unique situations will employers be willing to look past a candidate being currently unemployed, especially on his or her own volition.

However, it's a bit less of a risk if the candidate is strong, and is looking to relocate to a small / niche market, where it is hard to find strong candidates with real connections to that market. My candidate and her husband did take a risk in leaving their firms, but because they both have great academics and great, high-level, sophisticated and complex post-graduate firm experience (and several years of it), they will both land on their feet. My candidate certainly did! A high-level litigation boutique in Santa Barbara called our company asking us to fill a job order for them. They were looking for a strong candidate with a Big Law background, with strong ties to Santa Barbara. This is obviously very hard to find, which is probably why they reached out to us in the first place. When I saw the job order, I immediately thought of this candidate. I applied her to only this firm, and they immediately responded wanting to set up an interview with her. They didn't seem to mind that she was currently unemployed. The firm conducted two Zoom interviews with her, and decided to extend an offer after the second Zoom interview. The only hiccup was that my candidate doesn't and didn't want to start until December or January (even though it is currently the end of August). She eventually conceded a bit and asked them if she could start on November 30th, even though the offer letter asked that she start no later than November 1st. Now, I was very worried that the firm would respond negatively to this request, and might even

rescind the offer for asking to start a month later, when they had already been flexible and understanding in suggesting a November 1st start date, given her desire to take another several months' vacation. But the managing partner called me and said that he understood being burned out, wanting to take a vacation for several months, and that he himself had been very burned out after Big Law. Even though this firm has three trials coming up, the MP agreed to allow my candidate to start November 30th. She is, of course, thrilled, and accepted as soon as she got this news! I am so happy that she landed on her feet, despite being unemployed, at a great, reputable litigation boutique that pays well and is very well-respected in Santa Barbara for its caliber of cases and clients. I couldn't be happier for her!