

Should an Attorney Making a Lateral Move Send a Thank You Note?

By Nadeen Weybrecht, Recruiter

When I prepare a candidate for an interview with a law firm, I advise that the candidate not send a thank you note after the interview. This advice often surprises candidates, and I tell them that I, too, was surprised at how thank you notes are perceived in lateral hiring, having both practiced and interviewed myself. But, experience has shown that these notes can do more harm than good and that, more often than not, they are not a good idea.

Sending a Thank You Note Can Backfire

I have heard of numerous thank you notes gone wrong - notes sent out with an outstanding edit or error that end up costing you the job. A common mistake is a misspelled name or a typo. Another mistake I hear of somewhat frequently is an attorney interviewing at several firms and sending thank you notes to the wrong person or firm.

Unfortunately, these errors can harm; they are not just minor mistakes. I have seen brilliant, well-credentialed attorneys eliminated from the interview process because of an outstanding edit in a thank you note. The firm believes that if a candidate treats his/her career with negligence, they will do the same with client work.

Also, consider that in addition to stylistic and grammatical errors, writing thank you notes can put you at risk of making substantive errors. For example, say a transactional securities attorney writes to a firm that she thinks is a great fit and looks forward to taking on some securities litigation work. But, what if the firm does not do any securities litigation work? The firm might think the candidate didn't do her research, doesn't understand the firm's practices, and ultimately, she will not be happy doing the type of work they do.

Most Attorneys Do Not Write Thank You Notes

In my experience, more attorneys do not write thank you notes than do. So consider that the interviewers receiving your thank you note likely never wrote one themselves when interviewing for their current position. As such, they may question why you sent the note and wonder: Is this person's current job in danger? Has this attorney been told to look for a new job?

In short, a thank you note can make you look desperate.

I have been in legal recruiting for almost seven years. I have worked with many attorneys throughout the years. Some whose work had slowed down, others who had personal problems with a partner, some whose firms were shutting down, etc. I have found that the attorneys who feel the need to write a thank-you note are usually the ones who are in trouble of losing their job.

If you appear not to have any other options, the firm is likely to think there is something wrong with you, your work, or your work ethic. Firms want to feel like all of their attorneys are skilled and in demand. If you do not appear in-demand and that you always have options, firms will think that you are interviewing there because they are the only ones who will consider you, and firms do not want to feel like anything but winners in the marketplace.

Thank You Notes Can Demonstrate Favoritism

Naturally, you will connect with some interviewers more than others, whether about the work, where you grew up, or a particular sports team. When you write your interviewers thank you notes, there is a chance that

the interviewers may compare notes as they discuss your candidacy and their impressions. Suppose one note is longer than the others and expresses more enthusiasm or familiarity. In that case, this can create a bias against you by the other interviewers who did not receive such lengthy and personal notes.

Say you are sensitive to this, and you decide to write only one thank you note and send it to the most senior partner you interviewed with. But, this can also backfire. Again, if the interviewers compare notes, the other attorneys with whom you met might think you are brownnosing, and they will become competitive, deciding it is better that you do not join the group.

Conclusions

Applying for and interviewing for a position with a law firm can seem like you're engaged in a careful dance. Completing each step leads to being invited for the next dance. While every candidate, interview, and firm is different, I have found that thank you notes are not worth it in most cases. Being risk-averse myself, I think the risk you take in rubbing someone the wrong way outweighs the potential benefit of creating an advocate through this medium.