

Is it Better to Make a Lateral Move as a Senior Associate or as a Junior Partner?

I get this question all the time from more senior associates. The truth is there is no one-size-fits-all answer. In particular, one candidate was asking whether she should move now as an 8th year or wait to make partner and then move as a junior partner. To be completely honest, I don't really understand why someone would work so hard to make partner at their firm and then look to leave soon after finally making partner. Moreover, as an 8th year, you've probably been at your firm long enough (even if you only lateralled a year or two before) to know whether the firm is the type of place you see yourself in the long term. In my opinion, if you are an 8th year, you have also probably been told whether there is a chance of you making partner. If you don't see yourself being happy as a partner at your firm, there is no reason to not try and make a lateral move as an 8th year. Making a move as an 8th year is certainly better than being a 10th or 11th year associate. If you don't see yourself long term at your firm or have been given the impression that maybe you should look around, then there is no reason to wait to lateral.

Another major consideration in deciding whether to make a lateral move is whether you have portable business or not. In my opinion, you are better off lateraling as an 8th year associate than to be a junior partner with no business trying to make a lateral move. As a junior partner without business, firms see you as expensive. Moreover, firms are sometimes concerned that someone who has been so long at another firm may be set in their ways and may not necessarily acclimate to its culture. Whereas if you are an 8th year, you are still considered "teachable" and are more likely to adapt to a new firm's culture. This, of course, isn't necessarily true. A junior partner may be just as likely to adapt to a new firm's culture or even adapt better than an 8th year. Still, upper management at firms are often set in their ways and have preconceived notions that can be hard to dispel.

In terms of optics, some senior associates worry that if they move as an 8th year, [firms may think they are moving because they were told they had no chance of making partner](#). In reality, there are many ways a senior associate can explain why they have decided to make a move at this juncture in their career. One reason may be that the firm is undergoing a fundamental organizational change, as in a merger or taking a different cultural direction. Second, perhaps they are looking to go to a firm with certain desirable characteristics that their current firm does not have and does not plan on having, such as a specific type of practice group, cultural leaning, or a particular attorney you always wanted as a mentor. Third, especially now, some firms have decided to allow attorneys to go fully remote even after the Corona Virus is contained. Many attorneys are opting to go to firms that have embraced the concept of remote work. The point is, whatever your reason for making a lateral move as a senior associate, there is no reason why you should wait until you make partner.