

Switching Law Firms: Strategies to Increase Your Chances at the Next Legal Career Move

Have you been working at a law firm for years and are considering lateral hiring to another law firm? If so, then this article is perfect for you. This article is also useful for law students looking to broaden their knowledge on career strategy.

By reading this article, you will learn how to go about your next legal career move to increase your chances of success. You will also get career advice on successfully lateral, finding the right opportunity, what questions should be asked during the interview process, and more! So read on if you want some help and advice on transitioning from one law firm job to another.

What is a Lateral Attorney?

Before we get to the meat of the matter, we must define the key terms. In this case, "lateral attorney." A lateral attorney is an associate or partner who moves from one law firm to another. There are many reasons why the term "lateral" was coined for this type of transition. Still, in general, it stands for someone who has skills, experience, and knowledge that a [new recruiting employer](#) can immediately utilize.

Law firms hire a lateral associate if they have an opening and need someone who has working experience in specific areas of the law. Law firm partners [often make lateral moves](#) and bring a business book with them, which is why law firms hire lateral partners. If you find yourself stuck in a law firm job you are unhappy with but are worried about taking the risk of quitting your job, a lateral attorney move is something to consider.

When to Switch Law Firms?

There are several reasons why an associate might want to leave a law firm job. The following are some of the most common ones:

Toxic Working Environment

A major consideration is that your environment at work has become toxic, and it's no longer an enjoyable setting to be. A good example is if you don't get along with your boss or colleagues and the relationship has become untenable over time.

Job Security

Another consideration is if a law firm is facing financial difficulties, and as a result, one is worried about how this might impact their job security. A lateral move can be beneficial if the law firm you want to switch to has an opening for which you have experience or qualifications. In this instance, looking for alternative law firms is a reasonable idea.

Change in Career Interests

Attorneys may also want to move laterally to another law firm to pursue a different type of practice. For example, some lawyers might want to switch from litigation work to transactional law or vice versa. After all, career interests often change after law school.

When Not to Switch Law Firms?

It is not always advisable for a law firm associate to switch firms. In the section above, we've considered reasonable causes for attorneys to lateral. In this one, we share with you reasons that may lead you to conclude not to move.

If You're Happy At Your Current Job

Needless to say, if you are happy at your current firm and you are simply looking for a change of scenery, then we would not advise making a move. Similarly, if your current law firm is more prestigious or pays better than the other law firms' offer, then a lateral move is not advisable.

If You're A Junior Lawyer

It may be unwise for [junior lawyers and associates](#) straight out of law school to change law firms unless there is an opportunity that they feel they cannot turn down. It can take months before attorneys start feeling comfortable with clients, colleagues, and systems at new jobs - so it isn't always wise to make such a big move within five years of graduating from law school. In addition, starting over could mean leaving behind great long-term mentors who have invested time in helping you develop career skills.

If Moving Would Be Detrimental To Partner's Career

If you have a long-term partner or a spouse, we advise that you consider their career. If a lateral move to a different law firm requires relocating, and this relocation will disrupt your spouse's career opportunities, i.e., moving to another country, we advise against it. It would be best if you protect your [work-life balance](#) at all costs.

Risks Associated With A Lateral Move

As with every big decision in life, there are risks associated with making a lateral move. We recommend that you weigh the pros and cons before deciding to move. In this part, we discuss some of the potential pitfalls for attorneys who want to move jobs while working in their current law firm.

Stagnating Career

Making a lateral move carries with it the major risk of losing one's eligibility to make a partner. This is especially true if the lateral move is made before time. In this instance, one risk that lawyers stagnating their careers.

Financial Risk

Attempting a lateral move carries with it financial risk. Not all employers will take it lightly that you are looking to lateral while still in their employ. In short, you risk being fired! Even if you're not fired, your current employer might retaliate against you by cutting hours, taking away valuable projects and clients, lowering your salary, or any number of other tactics.

In some cases, in making a lateral move, one risks losing their client base and contacts. In these cases, the clients may not be willing to wait for you and may find another law firm that can take them on more quickly.

The Unknown

One must also consider the fact that [switching firms](#) may not necessarily associate with happiness. The law firm where you lateral to might not be the right fit for you. You may find that other partners, attorneys, clients, and staff are more difficult, less friendly, or accommodating in a new law firm than those with whom you came into contact at your old employer.

Emotional Risk

Needless to say, making a lateral move may carry with it emotional risk. This is especially true when one is making a geographical move. In these instances, one may need to part with a long-term worth of friendships and relationships. One must be aware of this risk.

Reputation

When one moves from, say, government work to corporate work, they risk their reputation. Your reputation could suffer because your peers can see this type of job change as less than honorable in the legal world. As

you well may know, reputation is everything in the legal profession.

How To Find Happiness In Your Current Job?

If you decide that you don't want to absorb the risk that comes with a move after reading the section on risk, but you are still unhappy with your current position, you can do a few things to make your time and role at the law firm more fulfilling.

Talk to HR About Your Individual Complaints

If your reason for wanting to make a move was to escape an unhealthy working environment, it might be worth considering if you can find a way to work within the law firm and still address your concerns. This means talking with human resources about how they can help improve the company's culture, starting by addressing some of your individual complaints.

Ask For More Challenging Assignments

If your reason for considering a lateral move is because you feel underutilized and under-challenged, negotiate with your supervisory lawyer about projects and assignments. You may find that there is something on offer if you ask for it!

Ask For A Raise

What if you feel underpaid? If you are unhappy with your salary, it may be worth negotiating for a raise to stay. While this may not always yield the results you want, it is still less risky than considering a lateral. In fact, it should be the first step.

Still, if the law firm experience is not what you want and nothing else will make you happy in your current position, then moving on is likely the best decision for your career and employer!

What Attorneys Should Do To Lateral

As discussed in the sections above, you should not take a lateral move lightly. While there is a lot to gain from making this move, one could potentially derail one's entire career when done wrong. In this section, we share some tips on the steps one may take to prepare themselves for a lateral move.

Review Your Employment Contract

It is important that you first review your contract at the current job. Is there anything that would prevent you from moving to a different law firm? If there is, then you should consider this before moving on. You may need to seek help from your legal counsel to sort out any legal liabilities.

Look For Openings

The next thing to do is see what law firms are looking for lateral attorneys. You can search these through various sources, including the job board at your law firm's website or by speaking with a recruiter from other companies and places that hire lawyers in-house, like insurance companies and government agencies. Find out if they would hire a lateral attorney and how their open positions align with your skillset.

If more than one recruiter is [interested in hiring you](#), it could be beneficial to talk about them to know which sounds best for you! This is also an opportunity to learn more about the company culture at each office and figure out whether it works for you.

Secure Your Finances

From the moment one considers a lateral move, they must begin securing their finances. Unless one has enough savings to cover one or more months' worth of bills, one should start saving as much money as possible from their current law firm. There are several reasons for this, and some have already been covered above.

As stated above, when considering a lateral move, one risks their employer finding out. Not all employers will take such a move in stride and will most likely punish or frustrate you. You may outright get terminated. Alternatively, you may find that your employer no longer entrusts as much billable work to you. In either case, the result is that your finances will be affected. Hence, it would be best if you got your finances in order in anticipation of these eventualities.

Weigh Pros and Cons

In the spirit of prudence, it is important to critically consider the pros and cons of making the lateral move. We have furnished you with some above, and you may use them as a starting point. We recommend that you literally make a list of pros and cons and trust logic to decide for you.

Do Your Due Diligence

Due diligence is important when planning a lateral move. By that phrase, we mean that you ought to investigate the law firms you are interested in. This involves obvious measures such as contacting potential firms directly and asking if they have any openings for lateral lawyers, inquiring about salary ranges and other benefits they offer employees.

It also implies that you go the extra mile. If possible, we encourage you to engage current and former employees of the prospective firms. They will certainly paint a more factual picture of the firm than a brochure or a website! This is perhaps the most important step; hence we encourage you to take as much time as necessary to search for all relevant information before final determination.

It is also important to research careers within the market that you are interested in. In this way, you will find out how competitive your desired job is and what it would take for you to land the position and advance within that law firm!

Talk to Close Friends and Family

We also encourage you to discuss your intentions with close friends and family. It is often true that those close to us know us best. Listen to their concerns and considerations, and take them into account as you make your decision. Aside from gleaning insight from loved ones, this step will also give you a better idea of how your decision may impact those around you.

Prepare for the Interview

Lastly, you must prepare for the interview process. You can do so by [practicing common questions](#) and any specific ones related to the law firm you are applying for.

Can One Look For A New Job While Still Working?

Should you quit your existing job starting the job search process? The answer is not always simple. If you are unhappy in your current law firm, quitting would be best to avoid any negative consequences like depression and anxiety. On the other hand, if there's too much uncertainty about how long it will take to find a job, then it may be best to stay put.

Is it possible to make a move while still working at your existing law firm? It is not impossible, but it is risky. Start looking for new job opportunities while remaining on payroll and under contract at your current law firm (which could lead to ugly legal consequences if your employer finds out). There may be backlash, and you may even face legal consequences for breach of contract.

How to Prepare for a Lateral Law Firm Interview?

We decided to include this section, as the recruiting process in lateral moves tends to be quite different from the usual job interview. The overarching assumption in these interviews is that attorneys already have

considerable experience in your practice area, and as such, they tend to be quite direct. Even then, many candidates are caught off guard by this approach and find themselves struggling to answer the recruiter. Read on to find out how to prepare yourself for [law firms' lateral interviews](#).

You must be able to explain your work experience clearly and succinctly. Top candidates can explain how said work experience would be of value to the recruiter.

Candidates often take being aware of their job descriptions for granted. While it's true that you're aware of what your role entails, it might not be the case that you can verbalize what you do. Take the time to write down your job description, and commit it to memory. To fit your work experience into the interviewer's firm, you must research the recruiter's firm.

Secondly, you may be asked why you left your previous job. For this question, you should be prepared to provide a succinct and honest answer. In doing so, we recommend that you avoid bashing your previous employers. For instance, instead of saying "they overworked me," you could say, "I felt I needed a lifestyle change."

The recruiter may move on to ask about your expectations. This seemingly simple question is anything but! You must deploy a lot of tact when answering this one. When asked this question, you should be prepared to discuss how you want to be challenged and your goals. If the interviewer does not ask this question outright, it is a good idea to mention something like "I would really appreciate feedback from my manager" so that they know you care about advancing in their firm.

This is usually the final question: "What are your salary expectations?" Be prepared to answer this one as early as possible in the evaluation process. The compensation you ask for will vary depending on market rates and other factors but know that it may be too late if you do not have a strong negotiating strategy before [going into an interview](#). To successfully negotiate compensation, you should determine what you are worth and be ready to negotiate with the recruiter.

What to Ask During the Interview Process?

The recruiter may ask if you have any questions for them. If they do, make sure you ask them questions to help you decide if the job is a good fit for you.

Examples of things to ask the recruiter include, "What is the typical career path for attorneys at your firm?" "How many hours a week are you expected to work, on average?" "Is there an opportunity for advancement in this position?" "Would I be able to take any time off during my first year (e.g., parental leave)?"

How To Inform Your Current Employer About Plans To Leave?

If your prospective firm would hire you, you need to let your current employer about plans to leave. How do you go about doing so? The short answer is that you need to be honest and forthcoming. By honest and forthcoming, we mean that you need to disclose your plans and provide as much information as possible so that they are not blindsided. There's no easy way around this dilemma: To succeed with transitioning into another law firm's job, you must terminate your current one.

The best way is for the law firm attorney who is leaving to meet with HR, their supervisor, or the partnership management at their current law firm to give them notice of resignation. This will allow the partnership enough time (generally two weeks) to find someone else before you start the new job. Remember, awkwardness during your exit interview cannot be avoided.

If at all possible, you should try to meet with the people you are leaving behind (the law firm attorneys who are staying) so that they know how much their work and input contributed to your career. It's a small gesture

but one that can go a long way in making someone feel valued.

Conclusion

Making a lateral move is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make in your career. If done right, it can improve your trajectory and lead to greater career options while maintaining your work-life balance. However, if not planned well or executed poorly, it could ruin your chances for future growth and career options.

The career advice we've given here will help guide attorneys through this process to avoid any pitfalls along the way by doing things right from the start. Our goal is to provide an easy-to-follow [roadmap](#) with all of the information necessary to help you make a successful lateral move without any pain points involved! We hope that this article has achieved that.

See also:

[How to Market Your Law Firm to Potential Lateral Hires](#)

[The Right and Wrong Reasons for Attorneys to Switch Law Firms: Should You Look for or Accept a New Law Firm Job?](#)

[Switching Law Firms](#)

[Is It Possible To Change Practice Areas In Big Law Firms?](#)