

# *Top Ten Reasons Many Attorneys Choose to Become Staff Attorneys Instead of Associates*

Many lawyers choose to become staff attorneys instead of associates for various reasons. This article will explore the top ten reasons many attorneys choose this path. These reasons include seeking job satisfaction, having a greater work/life balance, and wanting to make a difference in the community. If you are considering becoming a staff attorney, this article is for you!

## **QUESTIONS ANSWERED IN THIS ARTICLE**

### **1. What are the benefits of working as a staff attorney?**

Working as a staff attorney has several benefits, including lower stress levels, the opportunity for advancement, and the ability to work in various areas of law. Staff attorneys often have more predictable schedules than regular associates and may not be expected to bring in business. Furthermore, large law firms may hire staff attorneys to take advantage of their expertise in specific areas of law, such as tax or immigration.

### **2. What is "billing rate-salary arbitrage"?**

Billing rate-salary arbitrage is the practice of paying staff attorneys significantly lower than the amount law firms bill clients for their services. This allows them to benefit from the financial savings while hiring experienced and qualified staff attorneys. This practice benefits law firms as it helps them quickly hire and fire staff attorneys without incurring high overhead costs.

### **3. What types of organizations may employ staff attorneys?**

Nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and large law firms often employ staff attorneys. Nonprofits and government agencies may need staff attorneys to guide them on legal issues, draft documents, prepare briefs and other filings, research precedent cases, etc. Large law firms may hire staff attorneys to take advantage of their expertise in specific areas of law, such as tax or immigration. This can help the firm better serve its clients.

### **4. What can a staff attorney expect to do on the job?**

Staff attorneys typically work on various tasks, such as providing legal guidance to clients, researching precedent cases, drafting documents and briefs, helping with regulatory compliance issues, and more. Depending on their role, they may also be responsible for representing their employers in court and dealing with the media. Ultimately, a staff attorney's duties will vary based on the organization's needs and their level of experience and expertise.

### **5. What are the drawbacks to working as a staff attorney?**

Working as a staff attorney may come with several drawbacks. These include lower pay than an associate at a law firm, limited job security, and fewer advancement opportunities. Additionally, depending on the organization, staff attorneys may be expected to take on more administrative tasks than in a traditional law firm setting.

## **Job Security**

Many major law firms have seen the benefit of offering more job security to their lawyers. Many lawyers stay with the firm for years, and many law firms have also hired staff attorneys rather than purely relying on outside counsel for every litigation or contract task. This is also beneficial to those looking for a full-time career position, as many major law firms now hire staff attorneys, and many offer long-term employment security. As many law firms move towards providing their in-house legal services, this offers job security and consistent opportunities to many qualified applicants.

# Work-Life Balance

One of the greatest benefits many attorneys enjoy when they become staff attorneys is achieving a better work-life balance. While firm culture and demands in the legal industry vary, staff attorneys typically face different expectations than their associate counterparts. Long and grueling hours are avoided, allowing staff attorneys to lead lives outside their practice and improve their well-being. To some degree, staff attorneys benefit from a more predictable work schedule that doesn't require them to go beyond the call of duty at all times of the day. As such, they can make time for themselves while pursuing a successful legal career.

## Less Pressure to Bring in Business

At many firms, equity partners are under immense pressure to bring in business for the firm, as it can determine whether their job is secure. This can create a stressful working environment for equity partners and full-time associates. Thankfully, staff attorneys are not expected to contribute towards generating business and merely need to focus on meeting the job requirements of providing legal representation. Less pressure to bring in new business helps staff attorneys remain focused on their work, which benefits the firm overall.

## Less Competition

For many associates at biglaw firms, the scramble to rise above their peers and stand out is incredibly strenuous. The competition runs high in many practice areas, with junior associates trying to take on new clients to outpace their co-workers and gain recognition from senior attorneys. On the other hand, many staff attorneys find themselves relieved of such dizzying demands. Instead of vying for a slot amongst many competing associates, they can dedicate themselves to work at hand - efficiently submitting projects or seeing cases through from start to finish without worrying about career advancement. Similarly, many small law firms provide staff attorney positions that don't rely on internal competition; staff can focus on individual tasks and contribute meaningfully without fear or distraction.

## More Focus on Substantive Work

In the legal field, practice areas such as patent prosecution often require an attorney's full attention. Associates at law firms are left to split their time between client work and business development, which can be difficult when insufficient time is allocated for both. Corporate staff attorneys, however, do not have to worry about anything other than practice-related tasks. As a result, they can take on complex matters and develop practice skills more easily, making them highly sought after in the legal profession. This has become a popular option among law school graduates who want to practice law without the added pressure of meeting business development criteria for equity partners. Despite its many benefits, the primary motivation for any legal professional is still the practice of law, and staff attorneys cater to this reality.

## More Flexibility

Working as a staff attorney allows attorneys to take advantage of the practice setting they desire while avoiding the endless hours often associated with law firm practice. Staff attorneys often find that their limited hours allow them the flexibility to practice many different types of legal work than second-class attorneys in larger firms who are typically relegated to tedious document reviews or cases that may have little meaning for their long-term career goals. Fundamentally, more flexibility is a major plus for staff attorneys when it comes to practice settings and legal practice.

## More Time for Pro Bono Work

Many attorneys become staff attorneys to have more time for pro bono work, which is work done voluntarily to help those who cannot afford legal services. Associates may have less time to devote to pro bono work due to their other responsibilities. On the other hand, staff attorneys can dedicate more of their time to pro bono work, which is both personally gratifying and beneficial to the clients.

## More Time for Other Interests

Attorneys who become staff attorneys may have more time to pursue other interests outside of work, such as hobbies, family, and community involvement. Associates may have less time for these activities due to their demanding schedules. However, staff attorneys' limited hours may provide more opportunities for a balanced lifestyle. This can be particularly beneficial for attorneys who want to practice law without sacrificing other

interests or activities.

## Lower Stress Levels

Associates often face high levels of stress due to the demands of the job and the pressure to bring in business. Staff attorneys may have lower stress levels due to their more predictable schedules and the fact that they are not expected to bring in business. This can make for a much more relaxed work environment and provide the opportunity to focus on legal work without the added pressure of career advancement.

## Opportunity for Advancement

Although staff attorneys may not have the same opportunities for advancement as regular associates, they may still have the opportunity to take on additional responsibilities and move up within their organization. Staff attorneys who excel in their roles may be able to move into management positions or take on leadership roles within their organization. Professional development is an integral part of any career, and staff attorneys may be able to benefit from this as well.

## Why do Large Law Firms Hire Staff Attorneys?

Large law firms have traditionally employed staff attorneys to handle various tasks related to their practice. This includes providing guidance on legal issues, drafting documents, preparing briefs and other filings, researching precedent cases, and more. Staff attorneys can be particularly beneficial for large firms with multiple offices or a diverse client base. These firms may need additional support in areas such as regulatory compliance or client services, and staff attorneys can provide a valuable resource in such scenarios. Furthermore, staff attorneys can often be more cost-effective than hiring outside counsel for specific projects, as they may have less overhead costs associated with their employment. Finally, large law firms may hire staff attorneys to take advantage of their expertise in specific areas of law, such as tax, immigration, or intellectual property law. This can help firms better serve their clients and provide them with the most comprehensive legal advice possible.

Law firms may pay staff attorneys significantly lower than the amount they bill their clients, allowing them to reap the financial benefits. This practice of "billing rate-salary arbitrage" is highly profitable for law firms and gives them an advantage in quickly hiring and firing staff attorneys.

## Conclusion

Becoming a staff attorney is a great way to directly impact your clients' lives. You will likely work for a nonprofit organization or government agency, which allows you to help those who cannot afford private legal services. As a staff attorney, you are more likely to have a varied and interesting caseload than an associate at a law firm, where you may only work on one case. Working as a staff attorney allows you to learn about many different areas of the law rather than specializing in just one area. You will also usually have regular hours and days off, which can be very appealing after working long hours as an associate. If you are looking for ways to make a difference in your community, consider becoming a staff attorney.