



ATTORNEY SEARCH

By Carrie Leonard

Job-Search Tips for Out-of-Town Candidates

For attorneys in private practice who wish to relocate from one part of the country to another, the process of finding a new job can be particularly challenging. Busy work schedules, personal obligations, differing time zones, and lack of familiarity with the job market can often prove daunting for those seeking law firm employment in a new city.

Because BCG Attorney Search has placed hundreds of out-of-town candidates in new positions around the country, we are familiar with the unique issues involved in finding employment in a new city. Based on our experiences, we offer the following tips to help ensure a successful job search for out-of-town candidates.

1. Establish a Connection to the Desired Geographic Area

One of the first things a firm will want to know is why an out-of-town candidate wishes to move to the new city. Possible reasons may include one or more of the following:

- You grew up in the area and wish to return in order to be closer to family and friends;
- You attended school and/or previously worked in the area and have many connections there;
- The new city provides greater professional opportunities and/or a better chance to take part in the shaping and development of the law in your particular practice area;
- You wish to join your fiancé/significant other in the new city; or
- You have visited the area on many occasions, greatly enjoy it, and have long wished to permanently relocate there.

Because firms are wary of investing time and money to hire out-of-town candidates who may not be planning a permanent or semi-permanent relocation to the area, it is important for you to clearly explain your reason(s) for wanting to make a move.

2. Identify and Communicate the Value You Can Add to Your New Firm

Considering interview travel expenses, relocation expenses, and bar application fees, hiring an out-of-town candidate can result in a significant financial investment for a firm. Thus, it is critical for you to identify and communicate the special skills, background, and experience that make you a good investment for the firm. In especially competitive legal markets, such as Washington, DC, it is particularly important to distinguish yourself from the many other qualified candidates and demonstrate how you can add value to prospective employers.

If you are a candidate in a very specialized area of practice, where there is increasing demand for skilled attorneys and little supply such as an associate specializing in hedge fund and '40 Act work then the value you can add to your new firm is easy to identify and communicate. However, other types of candidates such as junior to mid-level litigators who have worked on a variety of commercial matters are in high supply, but limited demand, and thus must be more creative when identifying the skills that set them apart from other general litigators.

For example, perhaps you are a junior litigator working for a small firm that leanly staffs its cases. As a result, you have had the opportunity to take and defend depositions, prepare motions and argue them in court, serve as the primary client contact, and second-chair a state court trial. All of these accomplishments should be highlighted to demonstrate that you have gained vastly more experience than the average associate in your class level and are ready to hit the ground running on your cases.

Similarly, if you are working for a small, regional firm based in the Midwest, it is unlikely that firms in major legal markets in the Northeast will be aware of your current firm and its reputation. Thus, if your firm has received favorable press or otherwise achieved recognition for any particular attorneys or practice areas, and/or if the firm has a stellar reputation overall, make sure to communicate that information.

When identifying the skills and experience that would make you an asset to a firm, remember that firms can neither read your mind nor read between the lines on your resume. You must specifically identify and communicate helpful information to your recruiter and to firms, starting with your cover letter. Doing so will greatly increase your chances of getting an interview.

3. Plan a Visit to the Area

As previously discussed, due to all of the expenses involved in the interview and hiring process for out-of-town candidates, firms view these candidates as a more costly proposition. As a result, if a firm receives a large number of resumes from qualified local candidates for a particular position, the firm will most likely interview the local candidates before considering attorneys from outside the area. In addition, certain firms may have a policy against paying travel expenses for initial, or screening, interviews.

For these reasons, it can be very helpful for the out-of-town candidate to plan a trip to the new city, either before or once the recruiter has submitted your materials to firms. If possible, the trip should be planned far enough in advance to allow firms time to review and assess your materials.

Once a visit is scheduled, your recruiter can inform prospective firms of the date(s) you will be in town. Frequently, this serves as a method of getting candidates on a firm's radar screen and facilitating interviews sooner than would otherwise be the case.

4. Be Well Prepared for Interviews

All candidates should be well prepared for interviews, whether the candidates are local or from another part of the country. However, it is particularly important for out-of-town candidates to prepare, as they may not be as knowledgeable about the legal market in the region to which they wish to move.

Interview preparation should include researching the firms, the practice areas, and the attorneys with whom you will meet. You should also prepare responses to questions that will likely be asked at the interview: Why do you want to move to this area? Why do you want to join this firm? What types of matters have you worked on that would make you a valuable asset to the firm? Your recruiter can assist you with your preparation by providing interviewing tips, holding mock interviews, and sharing insights about particular firms.

In addition, if you are an attorney who is open to moving into a different or specialized practice area such as moving from general corporate and securities work to project finance work or transitioning from general litigation into intellectual property law or securities litigation then you must be able to articulate why you are interested in the new area of practice. This may require researching the appropriate statutes, speaking to other attorneys in those practice areas, and/or reading articles on the subject. Spend more time on research than you think you need. If a firm is investing the time (and, often, the expense) to interview you for a position, in order to be successful, you must be well informed, as well as interested in and excited about the opportunity.

5. Keep the Lines of Communication Open

Candidates who wish to relocate often feel particularly overwhelmed by the job search because they are conducting it long distance while continuing to work full time (or overtime) at their current jobs. In addition, candidates may be involved in other time-consuming activities, such as searching for a home in the new city and/or preparing for an upcoming wedding, birth of a child, or other personal event that may be the impetus for the move in the first place. For these reasons, out-of-town candidates may start to view the job search as yet another stressor in their already stressed-out lives.

However, candidates need to keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to find the right job in the new city. In order to reach that goal, it is vital to keep the lines of communication open, with both your legal recruiter and prospective employers. To that end, if your recruiter contacts you to discuss a new opportunity, respond to the recruiter in a prompt fashion. If you wait too long, the opportunity may be gone.

Similarly, if a firm requests an interview, provide your recruiter and/or the firm with available interview dates as soon as possible. A delayed response can be interpreted as a lack of interest by a firm, and it may decide against pursuing your candidacy. Even if you are uncertain when you can make the time in your busy work/life schedule to travel for an interview, communicate with your recruiter and the firm to make it clear that you remain very interested in the opportunity.

6. Be Realistic in Your Expectations

The job-search process can move slowly, especially if you are an out-of-town candidate. No matter how well qualified you are, firms may take longer to consider your materials if they tend to give priority to local candidates. Moreover, interviews might be scheduled several weeks to a month forward, in order to accommodate a firm's interview schedule and/or the candidate's work and travel schedule. Callback interviews require still more planning and travel, and the decision to extend an offer can take weeks to wind its way through the appropriate channels at the firm. Finally, vacation and holiday schedules in the summer and winter months can further extend the hiring process.

As a result, out-of-town candidates should expect the job search to take anywhere from two to six months, maybe even longer. By beginning your search with the understanding that it will likely be a long-term process, you will avoid setting unrealistic expectations that result only in frustration and discouragement. Finding the right job takes time, and you need to be patient, although that is easier said than done!

7. How Can BCG Help?

Fortunately, BCG's legal recruiters can provide invaluable assistance to well-qualified out-of-town candidates. BCG's recruiters most of whom are former practicing attorneys themselves are experts on the legal markets in their geographic areas and possess first-hand knowledge of the cultures, working environments, and hiring needs of law firms in every major legal market in the country. In addition, BCG's recruiters have established strong relationships with many law firms in their regions by working closely with the firms on a variety of job searches. As a result, the recruiters regularly receive information on job opportunities that are not yet widely advertised. Further, BCG's recruiters have access to one of the largest databases of job openings in the country, which is updated on a daily basis and offers the most current information available on law firm opportunities for attorneys at all levels of practice.

In addition to their knowledge of and insight into their respective legal markets, BCG's recruiters provide very useful assistance to candidates throughout every step of the job-search process. In particular, our recruiters will gather detailed information from candidates on their work experience and preferences in order to identify opportunities that will provide the best fit between a particular candidate and a specific firm; review resumes and suggest improvements; draft thorough cover letters detailing candidates' credentials, experience, and reasons for seeking opportunities at a new firm; prepare candidates for interviews; and serve as liaisons between the candidates and the firms through all stages of the interviewing and hiring process.

In short, BCG's recruiters will always make their best efforts to assist well-qualified out-of-town candidates in obtaining employment. However, due to the unique challenges involved in finding a job in a new city, it is important for candidates to take a continuing and active role in the job search. We hope that the above tips will help to ensure your success!