

Looking to Transition from Practicing Law into Legal Recruiting? Read This!

by

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On average we receive 10 resumes each week from lawyers who have decided to no longer practice law and are seeking a legal recruiting position inside of a law firm. Of these resumes we, unfortunately, may only respond to one (if that). In the past 12+ years of specializing in placing recruiting professionals into law firms, we have developed a keen understanding of what will work for our clients. If you are looking to make a transition into recruiting, you may want to take note of the information in this article.

The first thing that lawyers should remember is that law firms are full of lawyers! So, if a firm wanted a lawyer to be their next recruiting Manager, they could find someone in the Associate pool who would be well-suited for the position and train them. So, you have to figure out how to differentiate yourself from the rest of the lawyers who already work at the firm where you are seeking employment. There are two common themes we hear from lawyers when we ask about their experience with recruiting – they say one of two things: 1) “I went through the process as a law student and so I know how the process works.” or 2) “I have attended many summer events and it looks like fun.” Neither of these comments will get you the job.

It is important to realize that most recruiters have “grown up” in the industry and started at the beginning. Just like they couldn’t make the transition into a position as a lawyer without the proper training, lawyers cannot become a recruiter overnight. We feel strongly that a person cannot lead a team of people (successfully) in doing a job that they have never done themselves. If you have never filled out a NALP form or developed a strategy for targeting students or devised a highly complex interview schedule in the office for 50 students in three days, then it will be awfully hard to advise your subordinates on how to accomplish these integral tasks.

There are two other issues facing most lawyers who want to transition into a recruiting position. The first is salary: with first year salaries rising as high as \$180K, many mid-level associates are bringing home much more than this. So, the thought of taking a salary that is often half or more than half of what you are used to earning is a shock to the system. Second, as a recruiter, you are no longer a fee earner of the organization and are officially part of the administrative staff of the firm. You will most likely have less administrative assistance and be required to handle things on your own. We have seen this be a tough adjustment for some people and always mention it when talking with lawyers who are seeking to find a non-practicing role.

When reviewing resumes of lawyers looking to make the transition, we look for a resume that has been tailored to highlight any of the following examples that you have been involved with (*hint: sending a resume that tells us about all the cases and deals you have worked on will not be chosen*):

- 1) Experience with the fall recruiting process including: on-campus interviews, call back interviews in the office, follow up dinners/phone calls/emails
- 2) Participation in the decision-making process including: involvement on the recruiting committee when candidates are discussed and offers are given
- 3) Experience with the summer associate program including: event planning, training program development, work project assignment and evaluation
- 4) Assistance in development of recruiting collateral including: website content and brochures to be used on-campus
- 5) Organizational/administrative experience and managing people (if you have collected RSVPs for an event, handled nametags, negotiated a venue contract, ordered food for a large dinner party, these are all good to note)

It's true that your experience as a practicing lawyer is great when it comes time for you to speak "lawyer" - you'll relate to the Partners in a different way than a non-lawyer; however, if you do not possess the core experiences listed above, it will be tough to make an entry into the field at the level (both title and salary) that you are most likely seeking.

Here's the catch: let's say you are willing to start at a Coordinator level and take a potentially large pay cut in order to pursue this new career (and there is definitely a career path in this industry), you will often be perceived as too senior for the role. It's quite possible that the person that you would report to would not be a lawyer and that could be potentially intimidating for this person. So, we see lawyers get "stuck" somewhere in between which is why we encourage each person (regardless of if you are a lawyer) to find your niche and use that as your selling point.

As you can see, the transition from lawyer to recruiter can be challenging unless you have gained specific skill set that is required to do the job. The key is to identify whether or not you have the substantive experience to make the transition and, if so, prepare your resume in a way that reflects those experiences. This will arm you with a document that will demonstrate to a potential employer that you have put thought into the transition and, indeed, are qualified to jump right in and make a solid contribution from day one.

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