

THE NATIONAL LAW REVIEW

Legal Career: How to Choose the Right Law Firm For You

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You're still in law school but you know you soon have to find gainful employment. You also know there are a great number law firms out there, many of them having excellent reputations. So how do you go about choosing which one will be best for your legal career?

The beginning steps into a legal career are [significant for a first-year attorney. You want to put your best foot forward](#) and start off as close to your overarching professional goals as possible. Attorney jobs are widely available, but it's essential that you take a look at more than one law firm. Don't just stop at the one that offers the most megabucks off the bat.

Choosing The Right Firm

According to [Harrison Barnes](#) in an article entitled "How Should an Attorney Choose Law Firms," [there are six items that most attorneys consider when they are offered competing job offers](#). In order of priority, they are:

1. The perceived prestige level of the firm,
2. The perceived sense of importance that the attorney attaches to working in a given firm,
3. Whether or not the attorney perceived that he/she will be assimilated in a socio-cultural perspective into the firm,
4. The perceived work offered,
5. The attorney's perceived advancement potential in a given firm, and
6. Money

Interestingly enough, money is at the bottom of the list. The perceived prestige level of the law firm comes in at number one. Why? As a rule, those who become attorneys tend to constantly strive to be the very best. Barnes points to the fact that attorneys have been conditioned from the start to consider prestige as the best outcome for which to strive. In legal careers, prestige equals the best.

The more prestigious law firms know this and use it as leverage to negotiate salary and other benefits. A young attorney might have done a lot better, financially speaking, with the unknown but successful law firm down the road.

Focusing On Your Legal Career

Most people want to feel as if they are important in their job roles, and attorneys are no different when searching for legal career paths. In fact, an attorney may forego other considerations if, during the interviews, she feels that she will be treated as if she is important and where she can be inspired, according to Barnes.

Law firms that are aware of this are also able to leverage this fact in negotiations. The law firm that treats its



Article By [PracticePanther](#)
[Jaliz MaldonadoPractice Panther](#)

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[All Federal](#)

potential attorney with more than respect wins the best candidate. Barnes writes that it would behoove a law firm in seeking out the very best candidates if that law firm offers

- “(1) the potential for success he will have there,
- (2) that it makes very few offers a year, and
- (3) that he has the opportunity to be part of something great.”

Feeling welcome is human nature. Attorney jobs can go either way but you want to determine if you have chemistry with the attorneys in the firms to which you are applying. Barnes divides this issue into two perspectives:

1. the social perspective and
2. the cultural perspective.

From the social perspective, be wary of the law firm staff where are confrontational during the interview or don't actually notice that you're a person. Also, if the other employees are tense, grumpy, or militant, then this is certainly a bad sign. Move along to look for employment at other law firms.

The cultural perspective is important when you are looking at legal careers at different firms. Again, there are many attorney jobs out there. Try to find one that is attuned to you. If the employees, in general, have characteristics, traits, or points of views in common with you, you'll feel much more welcomed.

The type of work that an attorney is assigned can make or break legal careers. Don't find yourself in a job where you are not doing the kind of work that you aspired to, be it tax law, property law, or litigation. Make sure the law firm with which you are interviewing is very clear about the type of work that you will be doing.

Another key consideration is the advancement potential. Barnes mentions that at the beginning of attorneys legal career, most new attorneys who find themselves in prestigious law firms will say something to the effect that they're only there long enough to sparkle their resumés or pay off their student debt.

Barnes ponders the question of why they say things like this when the majority of those working in big law firms go into a partnership over the course of their legal careers. He believes it is a fear of failure. If all his friends and family saw that he left the firm before partnership status, they might consider him a failure. The point is, if you choose your firm carefully, you will one day make partner.

He also notes that with other attorney jobs, as in small firms, the interviewer will more readily boast of their propensity to advance attorneys.

Finally, the question of money is upon us. For many attorneys, other considerations are more important than money. However, many attorneys just graduating are looking at jobs with money on their minds as their first priority. The firm, however, might be looking at candidates who are in it for the long-term, hoping a new hire will stick with them for the majority of their legal career.

Conclusion

It's essential to consider different priorities when looking at attorney jobs. Not all priorities are equal, of course. In the final analysis, think carefully before accepting an offer. What is most important to you?

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