

Conducting an Attorney Job Search During a Recession – Part 1

By Vanessa Vidal

At ESQ Recruiting, we receive an average of fifty attorney resumes per day for open legal positions by applicants conducting an attorney job search. The quality of applicants is simply incredible. Corporate legal departments and law firms alike have been conducting massive layoffs, and an unprecedented number of lawyers are now looking to find their next job.

Attorney job searches are also taking longer.

The average time it took for an unemployed lawyer to find a legal position — full or part time — rose to 19.8 weeks compared with 17.5 weeks a year ago, underscoring the increasing difficulty the out-of-work are having in finding a new job. The more senior level attorneys, particularly those at the general counsel level, can see their attorney job search stretch to a year or more.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind for attorneys job-hunting during a recession:

Cry a little, but get back on the horse quickly.

Chances are you've just taken a big fall when that legal job went away, perhaps you were fired, your position was eliminated, your company restructured or liquidated, or you were simply the victim of the latest company or law firm layoff.

In any event, losing one's job hurts, and taking some time to cry and lick your wounds is not only natural, but also necessary to move on. That said you should not be spending too much time feeling sorry for yourself. A couple of weeks are fine, more than a month, and you will be more skittish about getting back on that horse. The key is to get back on the horse quickly and figure out your game plan.

Back on the horse, chose your path carefully.

So now that you are ready to get started again, you may start to panic a little. It's been a couple of weeks, and you are reading about the thousands of other unemployed attorneys searching for jobs – your first impulse may be to start sending out your legal resume to every single attorney job available. After all, something is bound to stick, right?

Wrong.

Sending your legal resume all over town in the course of your job search will only set you up for more failure, and take you right off your horse. It may be

counterintuitive, but you have to start by assessing your skills, figure out what you have to offer, and who would be best served by hiring someone like you. In other words, you have to be open-minded, but selective.

This is not an easy task, and many unemployed attorneys skip right over this step in a rush to find their next job. In an environment where many of your colleagues will be looking as well, it is important to identify what makes you unique.

It should look something like this:

- **What are your priorities?**
Finding a job more quickly and gaining immediate financial stability (law firms/government). Or, undertaking a longer job hunt and taking financial risks/pay cut (in-house/not-for-profit).
- **Was your last attorney job in-house?** If yes, then an in-house attorney job search may be the right path for you (depending on your priorities). If not, then you should consider pursuing opportunities with law firms, the government, and not-for-profit organizations and avoid making that in-house company leap for now.
- **Breakdown your practice areas (in %).** This exercise will allow you to determine what you are strongest in, as well as what other skills you may have to offer.
- **What are your specific strengths?** Have you developed a specialization of any kind, or acquired skills that set you apart from other applicants?
- **Do you have specific industry experience?** If yes, then you should focus on companies and firms that also specialize in this industry.

Conclusion

If you and your competitors are racing towards the same target, it might be wise to trace a route that best gets you there – and that may not be the one that everybody else is taking. Sure, that may mean you have to take some time to stop, think, and reassess, but over the long run it may save you critical time and effort in getting to where you ultimately want to go.