

Five-Part Mindset for Legal Job Search Success

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Getting a new legal job can be exciting but daunting at the same time. There are so many things to think about, from whether it is the best time to make a move to how it will impact your family and lifestyle and whether your new position and firm will be all that you hope them to be. Your career is a major part of your life, and chances are that you will only make a handful of major lateral moves in your career, so it is important to get it right!

As a BCG legal placement professional, I spend my days working with candidates who are going through job searches and transitions just like you. [My colleagues and I spend hours talking to attorneys at various points in their careers who face challenges and hope to make changes.](#) We understand what you are going through and want to help. We also benefit from hindsight and can see how decisions people make play out over time. We have a great deal of insight and information that we can share with you about this process so that you succeed.

In working with my candidates, I have [consistently observed that the most successful candidates in their job searches and overall careers are candidates who have a five-part mindset that sets them up for success.](#) The five-part mindset for legal job success is:

Be Purposeful

Be Open-Minded

Be Realistic

Be Responsive

Be Optimistic

This article explains the five-part mindset for [legal job search](#) success.

Be Purposeful

In life, things happen by chance or inadvertently all the time, and sometimes these unexpected turns of events work out well and end up being happy accidents. But inadvertence is generally not the way to successfully land a legal job. People who want a new legal job will most likely succeed by being purposeful and strategic about the process. If you want something to happen, you need to make it happen.

[You have already taken the first step in this process - you have contacted a legal placement professional.](#)

That was a good move because we can help you, especially if you adopt a purposeful mindset and commit to making an effort to bring the search home. You need to throw yourself into the process. You must resolve to make your job search a priority, ask as many questions as you need to, brainstorm different ideas and markets, and avail yourself of helpful career resources like articles and webinars on this website and other places.

Some candidates come to us with a very equivocal mindset and say that they are possibly open to a new position if the perfect job happens to come along. This type of vague, non-committal attitude sometimes leads to something, but it is rare. The candidates who end up with that perfect new job are the ones who have adopted a purposeful mindset. They have put in the effort required to ascertain what they are looking for, figured out why they want it and have committed to the process for getting it. You need to keep your eye on the prize - that light at the end of the tunnel that motivated you to initiate the search in the first place - and use that vision to help keep you going even when things get discouraging, and you feel like giving up.

I recently worked with one candidate who was making a very difficult transition from an in-house legal department to a law firm. He was in a niche practice area and fully committed to that practice area and his goal of practicing it in a law firm environment. Due to the limited nature of positions in this niche area and the fact that this candidate was coming from a company and not a law firm, the search took quite some time. But he was purposeful in his search and never wavered in his intentional mindset, including when things took a long time and prospects seemed slim. Eventually, things worked out for this purposeful candidate. He ended up with his dream job at a well-regarded boutique specializing in his niche practice area.

Be Open-Minded

Having a goal about where you want your legal career to go is a necessary first step for a successful legal job search, but it is not enough. You also need to be open-minded about different ways of reaching your goal. Candidates who are successful in their legal job searches stay open-minded, even as they never lose sight of the fundamental goal. Being open-minded means being receptive to hearing about different types of firms and markets and being flexible about compensation.

If your goal is to transition from one practice area to another - something that is very hard to do - then that goal needs to stay paramount while other factors fall to second place. For example, even if you would like to make this switch and remain in the same city, the opportunity may not be available there. Or you might not be able to keep the same salary you had before. In these cases, you need to be open to moving to another market or taking a salary reduction to achieve your goal.

A few years ago, I worked with a candidate who wanted to make an almost-unheard-of practice area switch from litigation to finance while still staying within the orbit of top AmLaw firms. He was willing to be open-minded because he wanted to achieve his goal of spending the rest of his career doing the kind of law he would find fulfilling. In the end, he got the chance he was looking for at a great firm in a market located clear across the country. It was a great opportunity, and he took it. Suppose he had foreclosed himself from considering the possibility of relocating to another market. In that case, there is a very good chance that he would still be stuck in a litigation career, which was not where he wanted to be for the long-term, instead of propelling himself purposefully towards his goal of being a finance lawyer.

Be Realistic

It is great to have big ambitions and dreams, but if you want to maximize the chance that you will succeed in your legal job search, you need to be realistic and manage your expectations. The reality is that the legal job market is extremely competitive, and there are many more candidates who want positions than there are positions for them. Even if you have top credentials, you will find yourself competing against other attorneys with similarly stellar credentials. The odds are that any given firm in any given case will pick one of those candidates over you - not because those candidates are better than you - but simply because they seem more appropriate at the time for whatever reason. (Of course, the overall odds are that you will be the candidate who gets picked over the other stellar candidates at some point in the process. Still, you never know when that will happen, which is why you need to apply to enough firms and stay in the game long enough to benefit from those overall odds.)

Things are even more tricky for candidates who do not have top-notch paper credentials or amazing credentials but are outside of the three to five-year "sweet spot" for making a lateral move or who do not have a book of business as part of their calling card. We work with candidates in these categories all the time. We are often successful, but generally only when the candidate is realistic about what is possible and listens to our advice. We might recommend smaller or regional firms or markets. We might send the candidate lists of firms the candidate has never heard of and would not have considered if we did not suggest them. We make many placements in situations like this. The candidates often end up very happy and not feeling that they settled or compromised in any way. Part of being open-minded is seeing the positives in a given situation

instead of the negatives.

I recently worked with a candidate who understood this. He was very junior and had only been at an AmLaw firm for one year prior to being laid off. Instead of limiting his search to other AmLaw firms in major markets - as many candidates in his place would have done - this candidate was realistic about the prospects of such a search being successful and instead opened his mind to the possibility of working in a regional market. Because he was both realistic and open-minded, he found success with a small but sophisticated firm that offered growth potential. As an added benefit, it was in the regional market near where he grew up, so he would get to be near his family.

In another case, things did not turn out so well. A few years ago, I worked with a talented candidate who wanted to make a lateral move from his AmLaw firm in a major market to a peer firm in another major market. The problem was that he had only a little more than a year of experience, and although he had solid credentials, they were not stellar. Instead of being realistic about the prospects of successfully making such a move and being open-minded to a range of firms, he would not budge on what he wanted and limited his search to only a few firms. Not surprisingly, he was unsuccessful in his search. Even worse, he decided to leave his firm without having another job lined up. He is now working as a contract attorney.

Be Responsive

Job searching is a serious endeavor, and you need to approach it seriously and professionally. As your legal placement professional, I am your advocate and counselor as well as your conduit to firms. Some candidates think that all that is needed for a job search is a resume. This is not the case - at least not the way we do it at BCG Attorney Search. You need to go the extra mile in your job search, and we need to go the extra mile for you! That means sending us at a minimum your most current resume (along with any suggestions or edits we recommend), [a law school transcript, and for any litigation or non-transactional job, a writing sample](#). [There are certain cases when additional materials are necessary or advisable, as well](#). These can include your undergraduate transcript, additional writing samples, a list of references, a representative matters list (for litigators), and a representative transactions list (or "deal sheet") for corporate and finance lawyers.

Additionally, we will send you a questionnaire to fill out, which is an important part of the process. This questionnaire elicits information that you might not think is relevant to a job search but which we can assure you is very relevant and can make [all the difference when it comes to motivating a firm to want to interview you](#). We also like to do interview prep sessions with our candidates, which can be time-consuming but which are essential to giving you the best chance of success.

The more responsive you are in communicating with us, the more successful your job search will be. We want to give the firms everything they need and ask for. Moreover, we want to be able to assure firms with confidence that you are the type of candidate who responds quickly and comprehensively when requested to do something, as that is exactly the type of person and attorney firms want to hire.

The candidates who are most successful are the ones who are most responsive. This means sending us the materials we need. It also means approving the firm lists we send you and quickly responding to firms when they request your availability for an interview. I had one candidate who, unfortunately, for whatever reason, dragged her feet in the simple task of giving a firm a few dates and times when she would be available to come into the office for an interview, which caused the firm to reconsider her candidacy altogether and pass. This situation was all the more puzzling because it was for a high-level position with an exclusive firm that many candidates would consider an opportunity of a lifetime.

On a more positive note, I have had many candidates who have gone the extra mile when it comes to responsiveness. I am confident that it made a difference in leading to offers. In one case, I had a candidate who wanted to relocate to California without having the California bar. This is extremely difficult to do, even if

you have good credentials and a good reason like he did. But he went the extra mile and did absolutely everything I asked him to do in order to tip the balance in his favor, including sending me approximately ten writing samples that I could use depending on what was most appropriate for a given firm and position. He also approved all the firms I sent him right away, and he spent his own money to fly out to California so he could be available for interviews. Despite the odds - no doubt in part due to the responsive attitude he had evidenced with me as well as throughout his academic and legal career up to that point - this candidate got several interviews and a great offer he accepted.

Be Optimistic

Finally, be optimistic about your job search and the possibilities that await you. Optimism is contagious! If you are excited and energized and have positive energy about a new firm and what it offers, that firm is more likely to be excited and energized and have positive energy about you and what you can bring to the table. If you are optimistic, everyone else in the process will be that much more inspired and motivated to help you and go to bat for you. This includes your legal placement professional, law firm recruiting staff, attorneys, and partners who review your application materials and even other people in the process like your recommenders.

Getting a new legal job can be difficult and, at times, discouraging. But you can maximize your odds of a terrific outcome if you keep at it and adopt the five-part mindset for job search success.