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You're Fired! And That Can Be Good News

By [Dawn Wagenaar](#) on February 5, 2009 @ 5:00 am in [Law Associates](#) | [Comments Disabled](#)

It's not something you are ever prepared to handle. You may have seen the signs or felt uneasy or worried that you're on a sinking ship. Still, no one appreciates the experience of being fired except in hindsight.

Appreciate a job loss? That seems strange given rising unemployment figures around the country and rising costs for basic needs. But this unexpected life transition can lead you to a more fulfilling opportunity if you understand the pros and cons of your previous position, what you really need and what you can offer to be successful in the next one.

Get In Touch

Take advantage of your social networks as soon as possible to find out who is hiring now or in the near future. Interview your friends and colleagues as if for a position at their firm: Ask about salary, benefits and the culture. Do your friends seem genuinely happy in the firms where they work? What do they like best about it? What would they change? What is their impression of the leadership and the career advancement opportunities? Would they want to work there for five years or more?

Also talk to people whom you trust who used to work within certain law firms or were affiliated with them in some way. They may offer insider information that recruiters or people currently in the firm won't share or are too biased to share. Even if you are not looking for another job, keep tabs on what's happening at other law firms and continue to develop your network.

Address Your Value

Before setting up any informational interviews or sending out 50 résumés, take stock of what happened in your last position. Think about the good parts and the not-so-great parts. What did you love about it and what did you find frustrating? Make a list of the skills and knowledge you gained and how you could apply that to your next position. Be honest about your areas of weakness and how you could improve. Think about the qualities you would like in a manager and what you expect from partners.

Research Your Options

Begin scheduling informational interviews with several law firms as well as submitting your résumé to firms that interest you. When you arrive at a firm, notice the surroundings and whether the receptionist and people you see greet you warmly. Ask to speak to other associates, a manager and a younger partner to get a general impression of the firm. If your primary firm contact does not agree to this, ask why: it may be a red flag. If you need to schedule interviews for a later time, do so.

Ask Good Questions

Remember during the interview, you are interviewing the firm as much as the firm leaders are interviewing you; your goal is to find the right position that addresses the issues that didn't work at your previous position. Ask questions that give you a good sense of what people value at this firm, and how they mentor and develop their talent. Keep these questions in mind:

"Does each attorney have a book of business or are they the firm's clients?" (This question focuses on expectations for business development and support.)

"Tell me about a successful mentorship and a bad mentorship. What went well and what didn't?" (This question voices concern about developing young talent.)

"How do you prefer that I communicate with you—by phone or email?" (If the other person says that it depends on the person, this tells you that he or she actually thinks about communication style.)

"What's your favorite part of the day?" (This focuses on client interaction, and whether attorneys at the firm spend time with colleagues or go home.)

After each interview, give it a "gut feeling" score from 1 to 5, 5 representing a place you would feel comfortable working and 1 being a place to avoid.

Even if your financial situation doesn't allow you the leisure to select the "perfect" firm, using these strategic and thoughtful tips when you approach your next career opportunity will get you closer to the right fit—so you can add true value in law and gain it in return.

About the Author(s):

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