

## Converting Temporary to Permanent Assignments into Permanent Offers

You have decided that, to make the next move a success, you should take a temporary position that will permit you to get a good look at the new firm. Finally, success - you get the perfect job offer at what you think may be the firm of your dreams. Congratulations, time to take a deep breath, relax and enjoy the change to the next stage of your career. But you can't get too comfortable yet; you still have a lot of important challenges ahead of you if you are going to make this new job a long term success and prepare for your next position.

The opportunity to try out a new position with no strings attached has important advantages. It also comes with the responsibility of performing your best while sizing up the firm and deciding whether you see the firm as an ideal fit for you.

In other words, choosing the perfect opportunity is important. However, that is simply not the end of the equation. After making the decision to take a new position, your focus should be on how you can ensure that the change is everything you want it to be.

Firms hire contract legal professionals for a variety of reasons. Sometimes good firms have the same idea you do - they want to be sure about a long-term hire. Other times, firms want to fill a specific need for a limited period of time, knowing that the work will not always be available. Regardless of the case, your longevity and happiness with the

firm will depend on the degree to which you are able to fulfill their desire, expressed or unexpressed, for loyalty and long-term dedication. While sizing the firm up for yourself, it is important that you feed their desires at the same time.

And, what better opportunity to make a relationship with a firm work than from Day 1 on the job - you have enthusiasm and a clean slate on your side. The possibilities at the new job are unlimited; you have been given a new chance to reshape yourself and your career. Make the most of it by preparing yourself to adapt and succeed at the new firm.

### **Learn From Your Mistakes**

Maybe there are things you could have done at your old job to make your time there more successful and fulfilling. Before you start the next job, take the time to reflect on the mistakes you made in your old job, and the things you could have done to better your performance. Take a hard look at any bad habits you might have developed, and make it your personal goal to change them. This is a perfect opportunity to retool your work habits.

To that end, you may want to take the time to sit down with individuals with whom you worked at your old firm and ask them candid questions about your job performance and how you might improve. Many firms are reticent to give legal professionals detailed evaluations of their performance during the course of their time at the firm because

the firm does not want to risk alienating them. Now that you are going, those who worked closely with you may be more willing to give you more specific feedback on how you could improve yourself as a lawyer. If you are really committed to making the most of your new job, early on you should focus substantial energy on strengthening your weak points.

### **Manage Your Expectations**

You have improved your situation with your lateral move. However, that does not mean that your job will be perfect all of the time. Work is still work, and preparing yourself to handle difficult situations is still important. You've been promised a position in the employment litigation section, for instance, but spend three weeks doing document review on a securities case. Remember that in addition to your goals you are still a part of an overall team. Your participation and enthusiasm for projects you may not have expected will be appreciated and rewarded in the long run.

### **Know Your Environment**

We encourage contract legal professionals to be proactive in jumping into their new professional community. While most law firms are good at recruiting and training associates, and sometimes do well at integrating laterals after they come aboard, most are not experienced with integration of contract legal professionals. Remember that you are jumping aboard 'mid-stream', and you are not necessarily going to be expected to be a long term player with the firm, so it will be difficult for any one attorney or senior administrator to put the breaks on to painstakingly mentor you through the process. You will have to show initiative. Do not expect your firm to provide

you with a list of "dos" and "don'ts" on day one; you may have to learn the unwritten rules yourself - and the quicker the better. Early on, spend time learning about the firm's people, its culture, political system, and history. Whether you plan to be at the firm as long as possible or not, convince yourself that your stay will be a long one. You should take the lead and introduce yourself to the staff at your new firm. Be nice to everyone, lawyers and staff alike. Although you may have been nice to the important attorney, you could quickly alienate him or her if you are not polite to their favorite secretary or staff person.

Take it upon yourself to learn what the lawyers do and show them how you can help their practice. Study the personal backgrounds of the firm's leaders, particularly in your practice area. Find out where the alliances and conflicts may lie between the partners, and how the pecking order works. Figure out which associates are the most successful and what they have done to achieve that success. Fellow lawyers may be the most useful resource you have in getting the inside scoop on the firm and its lawyers.

### **Good First Impressions**

The first several months at a new firm are critical. You need to show the lawyers and your other coworkers that you do good work, are a team player, and are an enjoyable person to be around. Try to make yourself appear to feel at home in your new firm as quickly as you can. Resist the temptation to view yourself as an outsider and temporary employee. On the other hand, recognize that you must strike a balance here. You want to appear comfortable and likeable, but you don't want to give the impression that

you are not interested in other employees' advice and assistance. After all, everyone knows you are new!

Although your first reaction may be to devote all your energies to producing good work product, you must allow time for socializing. Indeed, you should attend social functions of any kind to which you are invited, such as receptions, parties, group meetings, training seminars, and recruiting lunches. Any of these events can afford you good opportunities for one-on-one conversations with other lawyers. Make sure to listen attentively and ask questions that show your interest and enthusiasm.

After you meet another person at your level of the organization, whether that person is another lawyer, a legal secretary, or a paralegal, keep track of that contact and follow up later with a visit or phone call. This will fix in that person's mind that you are part of the firm, and that you are interested in working with him or her. These encounters provide you with a good forum to build relationships to support your growth in the firm. Some of these other legal professionals will even give you work assignments.

If there are not many social occasions, do not be afraid to make some. If you are in a marketing function of the organization, you should be particularly eager to get involved in this! Ask junior members of your work group or your peers to out to lunch or coffee. Getting to know them can be instrumental in understanding the more senior lawyers or staff members, and the political makeup of the firm as a whole. Just like anything in life, be careful

about the motivations of some people you befriend. Some associates may just want to complain about the conditions of the firm. You should avoid the complainers because it may give you an unfairly negative view of the firm and prevent you from exploring it with eyes open. Plus, you also do not want to align yourself with people known to be complainers or malcontents.

When lawyers or firm staff members who are senior to you ask for volunteers, be one. Your involvement is a great way to meet other staff members and lawyers, and shows your commitment to the success of the organization. If your firm has a strong cultural commitment to a particular charity or pro bono activity, you should try to get involved with that. Another great way to get exposure to the lawyers you work with is to help plan or make a presentation to your practice group.

### **The Important Part**

Perhaps the single most important aspect of your first few months at the firm will be the working relationships you form. You will want to try to build close relationships with the partners, senior associates, and senior staff members who will ultimately play the largest role in shaping your future at the firm. Regardless of whether you wind up staying with the firm, the impressions you leave on the lawyers with whom you work may well be important for the future, when you will continue to have contacts with these people, directly or indirectly.

For the most part, senior staff members and attorneys are most likely to choose others to help them with whom they are comfortable. Because you do not have a

history with these persons, you will need to exceed expectations in your early contacts with them. Make sure you create an impression that you do good work and add value to each project. Pay close attention to details, and be available to work on projects at all times. Make sure to regularly report back to anyone who might consider him or herself your supervisor. The first few months are not the time to assert your independence or become party to a turf battle. The impression you give, whether true or not, should be that you are there to serve. Being very organized will also help you do better work and will make senior lawyers more likely to rely on you for more important projects.

Realize before you start that there is not one right way to do things. Your new firm will likely do certain things differently than your old one, just as certain partners within any firm have varied legal styles and preferences. Do not be set in your ways; go into the new job with your mind set on tailoring your own way of working to fit the firm. If you keep an open mind, you might even learn there is a better way to do things. And if you think the new firm does not quite do things the right way, be careful not to rock the boat too hard too early. Try it their way in the early stages, or kindly suggest your alternative and see how those above you respond.

Be aware of the impression you leave on clients, as well. There is no easier way to get yourself in hot water than to upset a key client. Particular clients have particular needs. Do not be shy to ask questions of more senior legal professionals about these needs, as they may forget that you are new

and do not know the “rules” for that client. Some clients are highly cost-conscious, while some are not happy unless they know that every stone has been turned over. Some clients will have a very set format for how they like their legal work to be done.

### **Troubleshooting**

At some point you may find that, despite all your best efforts, your entrée to your new firm is not going quite as well as expected. You should be prepared to adjust your strategy in response to changes in the firm, or changes in your department. Conversations with senior managers or attorneys may help you understand where the firm is going and which partners may be best able to provide you with the work you want. You may want to shift your marketing efforts to other lawyers. If the department you are in is having trouble, be open to taking assignments from other departments. But most importantly, be prepared to adjust your expectations, by taking assignments that are not so interesting or desirable. You may find that these experiences not only give you the appearance of a team player, but they also expose you to new legal concepts that will make you a more rounded lawyer or staff member.

As time goes on, you will find that you are getting more significant assignments, that senior lawyers or staff members increasingly rely on you, and that persons who are junior to you are coming to you with questions. Congratulations, you have arrived. But do not let the success get the best of you. The difference between employees who enjoy long-term success and those who do not is the successful employees’ ability to keep growing and developing. Do not ease up on the standards

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you have set for yourself; success in the law is as much about maintaining a constant learning process as it is about hard work. If you keep building your relationships with fellow lawyers and staff members in your firm and with clients, you will continue to succeed.

Entering your new job with your eyes and mind open is the perfect compliment to your new position, and will help ensure that your law firm move, if it is not ultimately your last, will be a positive chapter in your career's development. Law Firm Staff is excited to help contribute to that continued success.