

## Moving your career to another city

### **LAW FIRM STAFF, INC. Guide to Relocation**

There is nothing more exciting than leaving one area of the country and going to a new area to start a new career and life. One of the advantages of having chosen a career in the fluid legal industry is that you do have the option of living in other parts of the United States or even the World. We have moved legal professionals from one city to another. Indeed, as a law firm staffing firm that places attorneys throughout the United States, we believe that we have made a positive difference in the quality of many lives through our relocation efforts. For excellent legal personnel, we are the relocation experts.

Nevertheless, we cannot always do this. For example, it seems that on almost a daily basis we receive resumes from Russia, Bangladesh, Nigeria and India. While these legal professionals may certainly be placeable in their own markets, the odds of us placing them in the United States are severely diminished if they do not have skills that are easily transferable.

When considering relocating, remember the first question you will always be asked is why? Deciding to relocate to a city with which you have minimal ties may not be attractive to a firm who is seeking loyalty and stability. You must think through the reasons that you have for relocating, and whether those reasons will appeal to potential employers.

Before you pack your bags, however, it is important to distinguish the types of legal professionals that are likely to have the most success in relocating from those who will not have success. It is also important that you know which markets are going to most likely be receptive to your efforts to relocate there. If you've spent some time reviewing the jobs we have available, you've quickly realized that there are countless opportunities in many of the markets that we are serving. As much as we hate to say it, your success in getting any of these positions will be dependent upon numerous factors which, in many cases, will have more to do with forces beyond your immediate control than with what you can control.

Several times on a daily basis legal personnel in other markets who are seeking to relocate to a given market that we serve approach us. When analyzing the majority of the placements we make throughout the United States, we have found that a fair number are for legal professionals relocating to another area of the United States.

Why, you may ask, has this pattern emerged? As a national law firm staffing practice, we can tell you that these placement results will parallel the results you will have should you commence a search through us or another recruiter. There are simply many economic and other forces that make all of this happen.

When relocating to a given market, it is extremely important that you have a good sense of how the relocation process works

and the issues that affect it. Your success in relocating to a given market will be influenced by a variety of factors; however, we believe two of the more important factors are:

- What type of legal professional you are
- Where you are relocating to

#### **A. The Type of Legal Professional You Are Will Influence Your Success in Relocating to a Given Market**

Your success in relocating to a given market will generally be better if you practice in a given area of the law that is in high demand at the time. Before we go into some detail about this, you should know the following. First, if you have worked at a good law firm in the city you are in, and have first-rate experience, you will have a very good chance of relocating if your primary experience is in a:

- Document Processing Jobs
- Administrative Job
- Marketing Job
- Human Resources Job
- Receptionist Jobs
- Financial/Accounting Jobs

As will be discussed below, the largest challenge for relocating is for paralegals, legal secretaries and contract attorneys.

#### **B. The Challenge of Relocating as a Paralegal, Legal Secretary or Contract Attorney**

While legal professionals are almost always in demand in both good and bad economies, it is often more difficult for legal professionals whose primary experience is litigation-oriented to relocate

than other types of legal professionals for the most part. Second, legal professionals with corporate experience are extremely marketable when the economic climate is good and can easily be relocated to other areas of the country. Legal professionals with corporate experience often also have the luxury of being marketable just not in other areas of the United States but in other areas of the World. When the economic climate is failing, legal corporate-oriented legal professionals have a very difficult time finding work and may even be laid off. Third, the more specialized the practice area a legal professional is in, and to the extent those skills are transferable to another firm, the more marketable they will be.

The following are our observations about the success different types of attorneys are likely to have in relocating to a different market.

#### **1. Legal Professionals in the Litigation Field**

While litigation-oriented legal professionals are almost always in demand in a given market (even during recessions), they do have a slightly more difficult time relocating on an ongoing basis than other legal professionals. For the most part, then, a litigation-oriented legal professional must have outstanding credentials to consider relocating to a given market. There are some exceptions to this rule, however, and these will be discussed below.

First, the good news. When the economy slows down, many types of legal professionals, such as those in corporate-oriented environments, have a very difficult-if not impossible-time relocating

regardless of the strength of their resumes. Conversely, lawsuits can drag on for years and even pick up to some extent when the economy cools. Thus, litigation-oriented legal professionals are almost always marketable to some extent regardless of the state of the economy.

The bad news is that it is far more difficult for litigation-oriented legal professionals to relocate.

One of the reasons it is more difficult for litigation-oriented legal professionals who are not truly stellar to relocate is because there are so many of them. There are far more litigation-oriented legal professionals than tax, ERISA and corporate-oriented legal professionals, for instance. The desks of administrative supervisors in major firms are littered with the resumes of litigation-oriented legal professionals, and for hiring personnel it is often far easier for them to hire local talent than attorneys relocating unless the litigation-oriented legal professional is stellar.

For litigation legal secretaries, for instance, there are also several less-than-obvious risks to hiring an out of state secretary unless the secretary has some really stellar qualifications. Finally, there are various rules for pleadings, filing requirements and all sorts of things that are unique to each jurisdiction and court that litigation secretaries may practice in. The learning curve is often far steeper for out of state litigation secretaries than for local secretaries, and such laterals who work in the litigation field generally need far more training than their counterparts practicing other types of law.

You must also be aware of the various requirements for paralegal certification from state to state. Many states such as California require paralegals meet certain requirements before they can work as paralegals. You should also be aware of the type of practice. If you have already had substantial federal experience, you know that federal courts are guided by the same general rules of procedure and evidence. Your skills in one state court may not be readily transferable in a different state, depending on their various rules of procedure and practice.

## **2. Corporate Legal Professionals**

Corporate legal professionals are the easiest types of legal professionals to relocate. In fact, corporate legal professionals can generally pick and choose the types of areas of the United States they want to relocate to if they have solid experience and are coming from a top law firm. A corporate paralegal attorney in New York, for instance, could relocate to Detroit, Miami, or even Memphis if they were strong enough.

However, the negative aspect to this reality is that corporate legal professionals are not always marketable, and their marketability will be dependent upon the state of the economy to a greater extent than litigation legal professionals. Additionally, a corporate legal professional attorney coming out of a major legal market and law firm in a city such as New York or Palo Alto will be far, far more marketable than a corporate legal professional coming out of a lesser known legal market for the most part. The perception is that corporate legal professionals coming out of a major legal market and firm will have far better

and sophisticated legal experience than corporate legal professionals coming out of lesser-known markets.

One reason that corporate legal professionals are very marketable is because the skills they learn - if they have the right type of training - are transferable. Additionally, depending on the type of experience, corporate legal professionals who become specialized often have skills that are greatly in demand.

A legal professional with specialized skills can be truly marketable if there is a firm that needs those types of skills. The legal professional could be marketable in Los Angeles, Austin, St. Louis and all sorts of places while her counterparts without those types of skills would not be. In fact, if that legal professional were one of only a handful of legal professionals in the country with her particular types of skills, she might even have close to guaranteed employment in doing that particular type of work.

Corporate legal professionals tend to be most marketable in large Metropolitan areas and also in growing areas. Certainly, being a corporate legal professional has some very real rewards because, as a corporate legal professional, you develop a skill set which is marketable in more than one place in the country at a time.

The downside to the marketing of corporate legal professionals is that when the economy slows, so does much of the corporate legal professional's work. In fact, when layoffs occur in law firms' corporate legal professionals are often the first to go. This manic up and down demand for

corporate legal professionals means that a corporate legal professional's likelihood of relocating is extremely dependent upon the state of the economy.

### **3. Other Practice Areas**

If there is anything you get out of the above discussion, it should be that legal professionals are generally most marketable when they are trying to relocate if the following conditions are met: (1) they have skills which are highly in demand, (2) there are few types of legal professionals like them, and (3) their skills are easily transferable. If you are a legal professional who fulfills each of these, and depending upon how strongly you fulfill each of these criteria, you will be a good candidate for relocating to another market.

## **B. The Best Markets for Relocation**

### **1. Major Markets**

In general, the best markets for relocation tend to be major cities where the population is transient. Relocating to a small town in Virginia, for example, would be quite difficult unless you were originally from that area. While we hate to sound like gurus on the matter, in our opinion the best major markets for relocation candidates have proven to be California, followed by the East Coast legal market followed by Chicago. All of this is certainly tempered, to some extent, by the observations above about the types of legal professionals that are likely to be marketable.

The State of California alone comprises one sixth of the World Economy. This status as a market should give you a good indication that there is a strong demand for legal professionals here and also that the

hiring trends we see in California can be impacted to a great degree by the health of the economy at a given point in time.

In California, the best markets for relocation tend to be Palo Alto, followed by San Francisco and Los Angeles, Orange County and San Diego. Legal professionals who relocated here from out of state have fueled the growth in the number of legal professionals in these markets in recent years to some extent. In particular lateral legal professionals in these markets have always been and will likely continue to be in demand.

We serve over 1,000 firms in the State of California and interact with many of these firms on a day-to-day basis. As recruiters, it is interesting for us to see how the different areas of California demand legal professionals.

The East Coast legal markets, including New York City, Washington, DC, Northern Virginia, Boston and Philadelphia are also very strong markets for lateral legal professionals who are relocating. One reason for the relative strength of these markets is that it is common for legal professionals to move up and down the Eastern Seaboard. A legal professional may work in Washington, DC for a few years, for instance, before returning home to Boston where he or she will join another major firm. We have seen a lot of this type of movement, and to a great extent this makes up a great deal of the lateral movement in the East Coast and contributes to the East Coast legal market being a fluid one for relocating. In many respects, this also mirrors California where legal professionals may move from Los

Angeles to San Francisco and vice versa. While these are technically relocations, in other respects they are not because they do not involve the same issues that a traditional relocation or cross-country relocation does.

New York and Washington, DC have particularly strong markets for legal professionals with corporate expertise relocating there. While this market for corporate legal professionals certainly cooled a great deal in beginning in the Year 2001, some observations about the state of the market should be noted.

First, in the Year 2000 the market for corporate legal professionals in New York, in particular, was incredibly strong. Legal professionals who were at mid-sized firms in places like Cleveland were getting interviews and jobs with some of the top firms in New York. This experience was mirroring to some extent what was going on in California.

The fact about the New York legal market is that it has always been a market of transient legal professionals for the most part, and this bodes well for those seeking to relocate

The Chicago legal market has consistently proven that it is a good market for legal professionals to relocate into. However, we should note that the hiring criteria of Chicago firms does not appear as vulnerable to the tides of the economy with respect to legal professionals relocating to this market. For example, during the hiring frenzy of last year and the prior year for corporate legal professionals, this frenzy did not appear nearly as strong in Chicago. While Chicago



is a good legal market, it traditionally has been much more conservative in its approach to relocations. The quality level of the attorneys must generally, and consistently, be high. Additionally, many of the individuals who relocate to Chicago are originally from there or have some sort of connection with the City.

## **2. Smaller Markets**

Smaller markets are often very receptive to lateral legal professionals. We were astounded by the number of lateral legal professionals who have been placed in the Seattle market in the past, for instance, and have been getting a steady clip of opportunities in markets such as Arizona. Additionally, we have seen some interesting activity in markets like Florida and Michigan that, for the most part, are not considered major markets. The key to lateraling into smaller markets is that these markets are not traditional destinations for legal professionals, and these markets-like all markets-have attrition and need to get attorneys to fill the roles of attorneys who have left. Another aspect of the smaller markets is that many are growing. Seattle is a perfect example. This market saw the likes of some of California's top firms open offices there in the late 1990s and early into this century because there was so much work.

While a market like Phoenix may not seem all that developed, we have been amazed by how receptive this market may be to certain types of attorneys.

## **C. Conclusions**

As a truly national search firm, we have the distinction of being able to have a pulse on the markets throughout the United States

and, to some extent, even the World. As a national search firm, we believe we are better equipped to handle the relocation needs of attorneys than any search firm we know of.

## **What Separates Our Candidates from Other Legal Professionals**

Being a professional search consultant at its very highest level is serious business. We believe that the mechanisms we employ to screen and identify outstanding candidates are among the best of any search firm anywhere. As most major law firms know, being a candidate of Law Firm Staff carries a cache that means you have met our high quality standards.

As much as we enjoy our jobs as professional search consultants, there is a downside to our work. We must regularly tell many candidates that we cannot help them. The upside to this reality is that when we do choose to work with a candidate, we will do everything within our power to get our candidates a job. In many instances this has meant helping the candidate refocus after unsuccessful interviews. We take a passion and interest in the candidates who put their trust in us. It should go without saying that we do not place every candidate we work with. In some instances, there simply are not enough jobs in a given city for individuals from very focused practice areas. Nevertheless, we do feel we are good at what we do.

Each year we turn down the opportunity to work with hundreds of candidates that the more "traditional" local or national legal placement firms would "snap up" in a second. Simply stated, we believe we know what we're doing. If we believe that you

are likely to become a highly valued, long-term member of one of the legal hiring organizations in a market that we serve, we will do everything we can to help you find the position you deserve. We take pride in helping those who are high quality “Law Firm Staff Material.”

The following list contains some of the most common reasons why our firm, as well as many of the other top legal hiring organizations, will refuse to hire you.

1. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate has unreasonable salary demands for the part of the country she prefers to work in or for the firm she hopes will offer her a position.
2. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate communicates to us that he has significant problems in his current position or had serious conflicts while holding down past jobs due to (a) an inability to get along with supervisors or other attorneys, or (b) the quality of the potential Law Firm Staff Candidate’s work. If we encounter this situation, we will ask many questions. Should we decide that you’ve done good work, we may still choose to work with you. This will depend on whether or not we have a legal hiring organization that shares your particular outlook and set of values.
3. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate has never worked in a highly respected law firm. This combination is not insurmountable--each year we place numerous candidates who do not have these basic credentials in top positions. These candidates usually have an “extra spark” to them.
4. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate has been out of work for a great deal of time. While this is not an insurmountable situation, you should have good reasons for being unemployed. Law Firm Staff only works with outstanding legal professionals.
5. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate wants to move for the “wrong reasons.” We do not simply “move legal professionals around.” We only move outstanding legal professionals who have what we deem to be the “right” reasons for moving.
6. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate is not truly “committed” to the legal profession. This is a rather subtle attribute. However, we can usually pick up on this since most of us have worked in law firms too.
7. Unless the candidate is seeking a contract position, the potential Law Firm Staff Candidate has held several jobs during a rather short period of time. While this situation is not always an insurmountable one, it can indicate that you’ve been having certain types of problems that may cause us to decide we’re not interested in working with you.
8. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate fails to tell us the truth about some aspect of his background.
9. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate has experience in a practice area that currently has very few (if any) opportunities in the part of the country she prefers.
10. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate is from “out of state” and is not firmly committed to moving to the market where he has asked us to set up interviews.

11. The potential Law Firm Staff Candidate isn't sure she wants to make a move.

The list of factors set forth above includes most of the information that organizations will consider when deciding whether or not to hire you. These are the same factors that we will consider when deciding whether or not to work with you. We think you'll appreciate the fact that we take our jobs very seriously. Since you cannot know for sure whether or not we will choose to work with you until you contact us, we hope we'll be hearing from you soon. We can guarantee you one thing: We will carefully review all of your qualifications and achievements before making our decision.

We take great pride in every candidate we place. We like to stay in touch with them throughout their legal careers. We consider each candidate we place to be part of a "fraternity" of sorts since our candidates share a unique combination of skills, talent, spark and motivation.

You will find that we will continue to offer our services to you after we place you. In addition to staying in touch with holiday cards at the end of each year, we will also be available to counsel you throughout your legal career.

Should we decide against letting you become a Law Firm Staff Candidate, we will usually be able to point you toward a search firm that would be more than happy to work with you. Please bear in mind that we often advise many people who contact us to stay with their current search firm once we've carefully reviewed their qualifications. What that means for you is that you are truly

receiving objective advice. We never make a placement for mere short-term rewards. Our loyalty is to the legal profession as a whole. Since you are an attorney, that loyalty extends to you as well.