



Is a Recruiter the Right Choice?

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Whether you are just out of law school or have been practicing for years, you want to find the perfect job. Perhaps you have been responding to Internet job postings and sending out resumes to no avail. "There must be an easier way!" you think to yourself. Well, there is. But relying on a recruiter is not always the answer. Even though recruiters yield mighty results for some, others do not fare so well with this approach. How do you know if using a recruiter is right for you? Here are some helpful guidelines.

Why Recruiters Don't Represent New Lawyers

If you are still in law school or have just graduated, you may have a hard time finding a recruiter to represent you. The reason? Reputable recruiters generally represent only top attorneys who already have several years of practice listed on their resumes. Recruiters make money because firms pay them a percentage of each successful candidate's salary. The higher the salary an attorney can command, the higher the recruiter's profit. Also, firms generally turn to recruiters when they have special needs for lawyers with specific types of experience. At this stage in your job search, you are simply not an attractive prospect for a legal recruiter.

The Down Side of Using a Recruiter

Let's say you are interested in making a lateral move and you have been contacted by a recruiter who promises you great things. Should you bite? Probably not. Even Nick Corcodilos, author of *Ask the Headhunter*, writes that "you don't need a headhunter." A recruiter is generally only successful in placing candidates if he or she has personal contacts at firms and companies. Think about it. How many quality contacts could one person have? Twenty? Thirty? Maybe even fewer. With job openings so scarce, those contacts might not even have positions available.

The best recruiters will only send out your resume to firms where they have contacts and where they know positions are available. Many headhunters don't have the necessary contacts, though. And they will submit candidates even if the firm isn't looking for new hires. The firm is then bound by the recruiter's fee agreement for the next six months. That means that even if a position isn't available immediately, if something opens up that you would be right for later on, the firm would still be obligated to pay the recruiter's finder's fee in order to hire you! Also, recruiters, just like everyone else, sometimes make mistakes. If you decide to use the services of a recruiter, make sure he or she is someone with experience in and knowledge of the legal recruiting business, in order to avoid simple mistakes such as having a recruiter accidentally submit you to your own firm. Usually, the best recruiters respect confidentiality, but they only work with the top one percent of attorneys seeking jobs.



While it is true that signing up with a recruiter guarantees you someone's personal, undivided attention, it's important to keep in mind that recruiters are running businesses, not friendships. It is unlikely that you are the recruiter's sole candidate. He or she may be pitching several people for the same job. So even if a law firm has contracted with a recruiter to find that one perfect associate, you will still have built-in competition from other candidates that the recruiter may be representing.

Finally, in today's tight job market, firms and companies are increasingly seeking ways to cut costs. Remember that a recruiter's fee is supposed to be paid by the firm. Therefore, if a firm has a choice between a candidate who is represented by a recruiter and one who is not, it will be much less expensive for the firm to hire the candidate who doesn't have a recruiter. Recruiters tend to charge between 25 and 50 percent of a potential employee's salary. If you are nearing the partner level, or even if you're an associate with several years of experience, that adds up to a hefty fee! And if a firm doesn't want to shoulder that burden, it may either disregard your candidacy or hire you and then take that fee, or part of it, out of your first-year bonus. In a perfect world, the firm would pay for the recruiter's entire fee, but nowadays, that is less and less likely to happen.

When is a Recruiter Beneficial?

If you are looking to make a lateral move and your qualifications exactly match a firm's requirements, a recruiter might help you get your foot in the door. However, remember that scrupulous, qualified recruiters only work with about one to two percent of attorneys seeking jobs. Even if you seem to be an exact match for a position, the firm may disagree. In any situation, you should always look to hedge your chances by giving yourself the opportunity to find every possible position out there, not just one or two recommended by a recruiter.

What Is the Answer?

Even if a recruiter doesn't want to represent you, that doesn't mean you don't have options. You have more flexibility than you think. Keep in mind that recruiters fill only three percent of available jobs. According to the National Association for Law Placement (NALP), most jobs are found through "self-initiated contact." A direct-mail campaign to the firms you're interested in will most likely end with success. Of course, you'll still need a great cover letter and resume, and Legal Authority can help you with all of your needs. Our company maintains a huge database of legal employers that is updated constantly. Also, our staff attorneys know what firms are looking for. For a small fee, we can help you prepare a targeted mailing that will get results!