



One Attorney's Experience: Making the Switch from Corporate to Litigation?

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Given recent economic conditions, many Legal Authority clients choose to make the switch from corporate law to litigation each week. While this is not always the best choice (especially if you believe that you are particularly suited to doing corporate work), it is an option that Legal Authority clients have chosen with increasing frequency due to the perceived stability of litigation as opposed to corporate positions. Due mainly to the better economy a couple of years ago, many attorneys were choosing to make the switch from litigation to corporate. To give you a sense of the mechanics involved with making a switch, we have profiled a recent Legal Authority client who successfully made the switch.

Mark*, a 2001 graduate of a top five-law school, had little more than a year of experience as a corporate attorney with a major U.S. law firm's Silicon Valley office. Mark's circumstances were particularly dire because he (1) was a corporate attorney and (2) had failed the California Bar Exam not once, but twice. Mark's law firm had the same policy as many other major law firms: *If you fail the bar exam more than once, you must leave the firm.*

While Mark's particular situation was rare, the legal market and practice area he chose would have caused problems for most any attorney. In addition to having assisted numerous other associates from top Silicon Valley law firms in landing new jobs, Legal Authority was already quite familiar with the events that were occurring inside Mark's own law firm because we had already assisted numerous corporate associates *from the same class at the same firm* as Mark in switching firms within the past several months. Indeed, we had even assisted a partner from the same firm who informed us that he believed the firm's office was in danger of closing (which it eventually did). While we had assisted these individuals in locating corporate or in-house positions, Mark's situation was something that we believed required a far different approach.

Prior to contacting Legal Authority, Mark conducted his job search for a few hours every day, trying a wide variety of methods for getting a position. Mark scanned online job boards, contacted recruiters, and asked his law school for alumni contacts. By January 2003—more than seven months after being let go—Mark had not received a single interview. After unsuccessfully trying to get a job through a preeminent San Francisco recruiter, the same recruiting firm recommended that Mark contact Legal Authority.

Despite all of the gloom, there were some positives to Mark's prospects by January 2003. Fortunately, Mark ultimately did pass the bar on his third attempt. In addition, Mark graduated in the top half of his law school class. Having seen many of his fellow associates get laid off (Several at his own firm were even let go while he was studying for the Bar Exam his third time.), Mark was not entirely committed to doing corporate work. In fact, Mark had become so disillusioned with corporate practice that he was not sure he even wanted to practice law at all. Nevertheless, Mark believed he owed it to himself to push forward. With almost \$100,000 in student loans from law school and a family to support, Mark felt a need to continue working as an attorney.



Mark was initially skeptical about using a service like Legal Authority, according to the Legal Authority Employment Advocate that worked with him. The Employment Advocate had to spend a great deal of time with Mark educating him about Legal Authority and discussing his job search. Mark's search was complicated by the fact that he really stood no chance of getting a corporate position. Not having passed the bar and competing with scores of other corporate attorneys who had not been fired for failing the bar twice made his prospects very dire. In addition, Mark was conducting his search in one of the worst areas of the United States from an employment perspective. Mark believed that if a firm did not advertise a position or hire a recruiter to track down a candidate for an opening, they were not worth contacting.

Mark's search was not going to be an easy one: Here was a great candidate who had both found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time and had not passed the bar after two attempts. He was also in the virtual epicenter of the economic downturn. He was a junior corporate associate and had not worked in more than six months. The Employment Advocate still knew that Legal Authority could help Mark, despite his situation.

Mark and his Employment Advocate spent more than two hours on the phone strategizing options. Mark accepted the idea that it would be in his best interest to move out of corporate law and into a practice area that was currently more in demand and would be more stable, like litigation. As a summer associate at major law firms in both New York and Silicon Valley, Mark had been exposed to enough litigation work that Legal Authority's Resume and Cover Letter Division would be able to do an excellent job both highlighting his litigation skills and helping Mark make a plausible case that he really wanted to do litigation work. In addition, Mark spent one year as a litigation paralegal prior to enrolling in law school and had enjoyed the litigation work there.

"When I was a first- and second-year student in law school, all anyone was talking about was corporate, corporate, corporate," Mark told Legal Authority. "Everyone knew that being a corporate associate could be a ticket to a super in-house position and stock options. When I was a corporate associate, I gradually came to realize that being a litigator was probably more suited to my personality. To me, corporate attorneys were just too uptight."

While it may not sound all that significant, making the change from corporate to litigation was a major career decision for Mark. There was a lot of strength in providing Mark with a rationale to do litigation work and seeing that his decision was justified in his own mind. He could have applied to scores of firms in the Bay Area for corporate positions and found one—most likely at a firm of fewer than 20 attorneys—that would not have cared about the Bar Exam, but it would have nevertheless been difficult with his particular circumstance. He would have many more options if he focused his job search in litigation.

In the San Francisco legal market, like virtually every legal market, far more firms do litigation work than corporate work. Adding to that, the corporate market at the time was in horrible shape. Mark ultimately decided to approach 300 large and medium-sized law firms with litigation departments to secure his litigation position.



Mark's final cover letter and resume reflected that he had litigation and corporate experience. While the cover letter emphasized Mark's litigation interest, it also mentioned his corporate experience in enough detail that employers would see it.

Mark received his Airborne Express package from Legal Authority on a Saturday. On Sunday, he signed his cover letters and mailed them on Monday. What happened next surprised Mark. By Wednesday, Mark had received 5 interviews. While 4 of the 5 interviews were with medium-sized firms, the fifth interview was with the San Francisco office of a major New York City-based law firm. By Friday, Mark had received 11 interviews, and by the middle of the following week, he had received 16 interviews.

Mark called his Employment Advocate the day he received his first interviews. Two weeks later, he called again to inform Legal Authority that he had accepted a litigation position with a mid-sized San Francisco firm—at a salary identical to his former one. And what happened with the San Francisco office of the major New York law firm? Mark was quite clear: "When I got my callback after my screening interview, I stalled and ultimately never went back. I do not think I am ever going to want to work for a big firm again. Who needs that? I expect to be a partner in five years at my present firm. If there is anything I would recommend to attorneys searching for a job, it is this: Don't use Legal Authority as a last resort. I could have been employed more than six months ago if I had used Legal Authority in the first place."

*Names have been changed to maintain privacy, but this is a true success story.