



## 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 to litigation each week. While this is not always the best choice 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. Conversely, 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 US law firm™s Silicon Valley office (the office closed in 2003). Mark™s circumstance was 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 have: If you fail the bar exam more than once, you must leave the firm.

While Mark™s circumstance was unique, the situation in his particular legal market and practice area was not. In addition to having assisted numerous other associates from top Silicon Valley law firms land new jobs, Legal Authority was also 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 switch firms within the past several months. Indeed, we had even assisted a partner from the same firm move who informed us that he believed the firm™s office was in danger of closing. While we had assisted these individuals locate 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 numerous methods for getting a position. Mark scanned online job boards, contacted recruiters, and asked his law school for alumni contacts. By January of 2003” more than 7 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 of 2003. Fortunately, Mark ultimately did pass the bar on his third attempt. In addition, Mark graduated in the top 50 percent 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 Legal Authority Employment Advocate Melissa Zelada. Melissa, herself an attorney, had to spend a great deal of time with Mark educating him about Legal Authority and discussing his job search. According to Melissa, æMark™s search was complicated by the fact that he really stood no chance of getting a corporate position. Not having 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.

Melissa also knew that Mark™s search was not going to be an easy one: æHere was a super 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 over six months. I knew that Legal Authority could help Mark despite his situation.

Melissa and Mark spent over 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 both a major New York and Silicon Valley law firm, Mark had been exposed to enough litigation work that Melissa knew 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. Melissa also felt there was a lot of strength in providing Mark with a rationale to do litigation work and that his decision was justified in his own mind. According to Melissa, Mark wanted a job. He could have applied to scores of firms in the Bay Area for a corporate position and gotten another one—most likely at a firm of less than 20 attorneys that would not have cared about the Bar Exam, but it would have nevertheless been difficult with his particular circumstance. When I sensed he did not really enjoy corporate anyway, it was somewhat refreshing because I knew he would have a lot of choice in the litigation realm.

Melissa and Mark believed that the best strategy was to follow his heart and go for a litigation position. In the San Francisco legal market, like virtually every legal market, far more firms do litigation work than corporate work. Finally, 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 and resume specialist Christopher Dacus worked on several versions of his resume and cover letter with Legal Authority. Dacus, who received his Master™s Degree in English literature from the University of Pennsylvania, had counseled hundreds of attorneys in his time as a professional writer. According to Dacus, the largest challenge with Mark™s cover letter was that Mark really needed a job and would basically take any position offered, and he needed to portray strength while not appearing desperate.

According to Chris, Mark didn™t want to put all his eggs in one basket. Essentially, he was hoping that a corporate position would open up for him if the litigation strategy failed. When I am working with our clients at Legal Authority, I am always cognizant that my goal is to ensure that they get a job.

Mark™s final cover letter and resume reflected that he had litigation and corporate experience. While the cover letter emphasized Mark™s litigation interest but 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 Melissa the day he received his first interviews. Two weeks later, he called Melissa again to tell her 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 call back 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 6 months ago if I had used Legal Authority in the first place.

\*Names have been changed to maintain privacy, but this is a 100% true success story.