



IN SIGHT

for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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HOW A LEGAL RECRUITER CAN HELP YOUR CAREER

This article is a summary of information provided to *In Sight* by several recruiters. It explains the nuts and bolts of legal recruiting so that you can determine whether this is a step you'd like to explore in your search for job satisfaction.

I've heard the term "headhunter." Is it the same as "legal recruiter?" Yes. The term "headhunter" is often used to refer to the part of the process when an employer contacts a recruiter to locate an employee. This process is one aspect of the services a recruiter provides. Recruiters also help people find new jobs or refine their career goals. A legal recruiter can serve as a "headhunter," a "job hunter," or a career counselor.

How does a recruiter help with my job search? A recruiter can tell you what the current market looks like for lawyers in your specialty and geographic area. A good recruiter should be able to give you very specific firsthand information about the local legal community. He or she can help you compare your current situation with other opportunities.

A recruiter can also act as a career counselor in trying to find the right fit for you. Working with a legal recruiter is typically a coaching process. The recruiter may help you revise your résumé or prepare different versions of résumés. He or she may talk to you about presentation and interview preparation. The recruiter may also advise you about the firms you interview with and guide you through the decision process, keeping you focused and on track. Some recruiters can help you develop your long-term career goals and a

strategy for reaching them.

Recruiters can also help in other ways. At the associate level, salary ranges are somewhat fixed, so the recruiter can't do much salary negotiation for you. They can, however, help you understand the bonus system, other benefits, and cost-of-living comparisons. Recruiters can also help negotiate complex partner-level compensation, as well as in-house corporate compensation and benefit packages.

Does a recruiter search only within the pool of firms that have called the recruiter with a specific hiring need? No. Most recruiters will present your résumé to any firm they think might be a good match for you, regardless of whether the firm has already contacted them. The opposite is also true. When a firm engages a recruiter to find a new hire, most recruiters not only look at their database of candidates, but also contact other lawyers in the community who they think might be interested in the position.

Who pays the recruiter's fees? Does the recruiter represent me or the firms? The recruiter's fees are usually paid by the law firm or corporate legal department, so some people say that the recruiter's allegiance lies primarily with the firm. However, it is in everyone's interest (including the recruiter's) to accurately represent all aspects of the recruiting process to both parties. The recruiter is not likely to "sell" you on a firm that you wouldn't otherwise want to join, because they want to find a good match for you and to place you where you will stay. If it doesn't work out for either party, then it isn't an effective placement, which doesn't enhance the recruiter's reputation in the legal com-

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munity. So recruiters have a personal interest in brokering a “double sale” that is sweet for both you and the firm. Their loyalties are actually fairly evenly divided.

Is my relationship with a recruiter exclusive?

Most recruiters say that it’s best if it is. Often, lawyers looking for a new firm will contact multiple recruiters, thinking that they are increasing their odds of getting hired. On the contrary, it really muddies the waters, duplicating the recruiters’ efforts and frustrating the in-house recruiters or hiring partners. Conflicting presentations of the same candidate by different recruiters might even cost you your chances to land a particular job. Most recruiters will advise you to find one recruiter you feel comfortable with, whose style matches yours, and stay with that recruiter throughout the process.

On the other hand, sometimes an exclusive relationship doesn’t make sense for the candidate. For instance, if you are looking at other markets as well as the Northwest, you probably would want to work with recruiters who are familiar with those communities. For candidates who want to stay in the Northwest, however, the best relationship is exclusive.

How do I find a recruiter? The *Oregon State Bar Bulletin* has a section where recruiters and staffing companies can advertise their services. That’s an easy place to start when looking for a local recruiter. You can also check for recruiter ads in the *National Law Journal* and *The Business Journal* of Portland. The National Association of Legal Search Consultants maintains a directory of legal recruiters, as does FindLaw. Many recruiters get business from referrals, so a very effective way to find a recruiter is to ask colleagues you trust whether they can recommend someone. Another resource for researching recruiters is the Internet.

How can I get a recruiter’s attention? You must first do some self-appraisal. Presenting a candid picture of yourself – detailing your experiences (or lack of) in a particular practice area – helps the recruiter immensely. Bring your professional accomplishments to the recruiter’s attention. If you are new to the legal profession, or for some other reason need help developing your “package” of marketable skills, you may first want to consult with a career counselor.

The attorney counselors at the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program (OAAP) can help you get started on this part of the process. You can reach the OAAP at 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227.

How should I evaluate potential recruiters? Recruiters should be willing to answer the following questions: How long have you been in the recruiting business? What was your professional experience before becoming a recruiter? What is your educational background? Do you have any knowledge of the legal market in addition to being a recruiter? Do you have a specialty? What is your placement record in the target market I am interested in?

Some other questions you might want to research indirectly are: What is the recruiter’s reputation in the legal community? Does he or she have established relationships with the hiring authorities at firms you would be interested in working for? Has the recruiter changed recruiting firms several times?

Finally, you should evaluate your comfort level with the recruiter. Do you agree with his or her placement philosophy? Do you think the recruiter will be a good career coach for you? Do you trust him or her to help you manage your career? Would you feel comfortable calling the recruiter to ask “dumb” questions? These are questions that only you can answer, and they will differ for everyone.

How often should I check in with my recruiter? In the recruiting process, time is often of the essence. When your recruiter contacts you or asks for more information, respond immediately. In a stagnant market or one without many options for a particular candidate, checking in with your recruiter every few weeks is appropriate. Establish a communication pattern that allows you to gauge the recruiter’s performance and still keep tabs on your career. Stay involved and follow up – your career is an important aspect of your life.

How long will it take for the recruiter to place me? Anywhere from two weeks to a year. In the current, relatively slow market, some recruiters say it takes an average of six months. In a market with more openings, two to four months is more the norm. Even the most straightforward placement – such as when a firm has a clear and compelling need – can

still take months. Set a realistic time frame for your search. Typically, January and February are months of increased job movement. If you're thinking of moving to a new firm and the end of the year is approaching, you may want to adjust your strategic planning accordingly.

Should I use a local or national recruiting firm? It depends on the scope of your search. If you are looking for a job in several legal markets, then a national firm might be perfectly positioned to help you. If you can get one of the large, international recruiters to devote resources to your particular case, you would likely be well-served. But if you are focused on a smaller market like the Northwest, work with a local recruiter who knows the local market and its history.

More often than not, it's the smaller, regional recruiting firms that have the inside market data, connections, and relationships that are so important in making a placement. Local knowledge is key – not only of the legal community but also of specific practice areas. It really comes down to the relationships the recruiter has established with local law firms.

What if I live outside the Portland-metro area? Generally, recruiters are based in the more populated areas, and most of the lawyer hires in smaller cities and towns are not done through a recruiter. Firms in other areas of the state occasionally call recruiters, but for the most part they do their own recruiting. However, some recruiters do have connections in other areas of the state and occasionally make placements outside Portland. If you live in a smaller city or town or want to move to one, one of the first questions you should ask when interviewing potential recruiters is whether they have connections with firms in the area you live or would like to live.

Can I get placed at small or medium-sized firms or only at large ones? Some recruiters only work with large firms, or with spin-offs, branches, or satellite offices of large firms. Although bigger firms have the resources and generally are more willing to pay recruiters, some smaller firms also use recruiters. Sometimes big-firm recruiters will pass along information about potential openings with smaller firms to candidates they think might be interested. If you want to work in a small firm, ask potential recruiters

whether they've made any placements in the size and type of firm you are interested in.

Should I look for a job myself while I have engaged a recruiter? Recruiters suggest that you use a recruiter first and see what he or she can do for you. You may gain a great deal by using a prepaid source first – and it doesn't cost you anything. You can always fall back on your individual contacts if the recruiting process doesn't yield any offers. If you explore your own contacts before hiring a recruiter, the recruiter can work with you in the rest of the market, but he or she can't help negotiate a deal with that particular firm.

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