

Careers Outside of Law

Q. I keep hearing about attorneys who moved from the practice of law into exciting, new careers outside of law. How did they do it? I know that I have many talents and abilities, but I can't seem to get an employer to take a chance with me. During the past several months I have responded to numerous ads for interesting positions. I have had only one interview, and it did not go well. Do you have any suggestions?

A. Yes! First of all, employers don't like to take chances. You need to convince an employer that you are the preferred candidate. That requires a lot of work on your part before you even submit your resume.

Most employers are not impressed with someone who has a variety of interests and skills but no focus. From what you have told me, you may not have done an adequate self-assessment before commencing your search. Self-assessment is critical to a successful search -- especially if you are contemplating a career change. Most effective self-assessments involve a careful evaluation of your talents, skills, motivations and values.

One exercise that may get you started is compiling a detailed list of your past accomplishments. Focus primarily on your professional accomplishments, but don't ignore the personal. In listing your accomplishments, include only those that you can honestly say 1) you did well, 2) you enjoyed while you were doing them, and 3) you were proud of when you were finished. Once you have completed your detailed list, take a long, hard look at the patterns you see emerge. If you are not able to discern the patterns, perhaps you may benefit by working with a friend or a career counselor.

Once you have identified two or three career directions, you will want to create appropriate resumes. Transitional resumes are more difficult and time-consuming because you need to include a "qualifications" section that details your work history in terms that are relevant to your new career direction. Then you will need to network to meet people in the fields of interest to you. Most available positions are never advertised, and networking is the only way to find these "hidden" jobs.

Also, for career changers, it is even harder to get hired in response to ads, because the pool of applicants almost always includes individuals who have the relevant experience. You are right -- many attorneys have made very successful moves to exciting non-law careers. If you talk to them, you will find that it did not

happen magically. They probably spent a great deal of time and effort before they moved to their new and exciting careers. With diligence and perseverance, you can too!

By Karen J. Summerville, J.D.

206.224.7608

www.legalcareermanagement.com

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