

Alternative Careers for Lawyers

Where to Start?

By Ruth S. Stevens

The idea of alternative careers for lawyers has taken on new meaning in today's business and legal environment. Practicing law no longer means going to an office 40-plus hours a week. More than half of lawyers report working remotely at least part-time.¹ Advances in technology have also created entirely new career paths for attorneys, such as "knowledge management counsel" and law firm "privacy officer." These emerging jobs and others that are more established provide many alternatives for lawyers who are considering opting out of traditional law firm practice.

Perhaps the first stop for a lawyer thinking about a change should be the website for the career services office at the lawyer's alma mater. Law schools typically offer support for graduates looking for new positions regardless of the number of years that have elapsed since they graduated. A review of law school web pages reveals a range of useful resources. For example, the University of Michigan Law School lists the job titles of graduates from recent graduating classes.² These titles provide clues to alternative settings in which legal skills are valued. The Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School has a page dedicated to alumni job seekers that offers one-on-one job search counseling.³ This type of service is available from most, if not all, law schools and may be overlooked by attorneys who are not recent graduates. The Michigan State University College of Law provides online videos, including one on how to network effectively—a useful skill for lawyers seeking to expand their horizons.⁴ Some law schools also offer resources focusing on particular sectors of the job market. For example, Wayne State University Law School has a page with information about careers in public service.⁵

And, of course, law school online job boards should not be overlooked.

Using law school resources is a starting point, but changing to a career that is radically different from law firm practice can also require some soul searching. Larry Richard and Tanya Hanson's *The New What Can You Do With a Law Degree?*⁶ starts by guiding readers through a self-assessment. Before discussing specific job-search strategies, the authors direct readers to consider various dimensions of work and personal life that affect career satisfaction. Richard and Hanson's Career Satisfaction Model™ walks readers through an examination of their personal values, psychological needs, communication style, motivation, and interests. Similarly, Greg Yates's *Professional Prosperity for Lawyers: Find the Perfect Job and Create Your Ideal Career*⁷ encourages prospective career changers to take time for reflection before launching into an active search for new opportunities and provides a structured approach for this reflection.

Additional resources are helpful once an active job search is underway. Fortunately, there is a wide array of material targeted toward attorneys seeking to discover new venues for applying their legal skills. Books for attorneys exploring new options include Gary Munneke's *Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers*⁸ and Ursula Furi-Perry's *50 Unique Legal Paths: How to Find the Right Job*.⁹ The website for LawCrossing, an online job board, gets right to the heart of the matter with its post, "60 Nontraditional Jobs You

Can Do with a Law Degree (and Should Strongly Consider Doing)."¹⁰ This article gives specific examples of careers outside of law firms that are a good fit for attorneys. Other helpful web resources include "Nine Non-Legal Jobs That You Can (Really, Truly) Do With a Law Degree,"¹¹ the National Association for Law Placement's overview of alternative careers,¹² and Above the Law's Career Alternatives page.¹³ The books *From Lemons to Lemonade in the New Legal Job Market*¹⁴ and *The Legal Career Guide*¹⁵ are helpful for those looking for a more general overview of the job-search process.

Bar associations are also actively involved in helping members manage their careers in the midst of a changing legal environment. The American Bar Association Law Practice Management Section and Legal Technology Center help lawyers stay abreast of new developments affecting career options. In addition, the ABA has articles and webinars devoted to the topic of alternative careers for lawyers.¹⁶ The State Bar of Michigan provides a Career Center with job postings for its members.¹⁷

Lastly, those facing the daunting task of changing careers may simply want inspiration from other attorneys who have taken bold steps to remake their professional lives. The ABA *Legal Rebels*¹⁸ series profiles attorneys who are redefining what it means to practice law. These profiles point toward new ways attorneys can make a living using their legal skills. Liz Brown's *Life After Law: Finding Work You Love with the J.D. You*

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*Have*¹⁹ tells the stories of attorneys who have found ways to repurpose their legal skills in new and rewarding careers.

All of these resources will help attorneys who are looking for something different to find work outside of law firms that is both professionally and personally satisfying. ■



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ENDNOTES

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