

## Jobs Update

### Devise a Job-Search Game Plan (and Contact Your Law School Career Center)

*By Bill Chamberlain and Arthur Fama*

Whether you have been laid off or you are trying to cope with the lack of job security, your first impulse may be to send out hundreds of résumés in response to online job ads. However, taking some time to assess your situation and devise a game plan before you job search will reap better results.

Developing an effective job-search strategy should begin with a thorough career self-assessment. Start by exploring and answering these questions:

- What do you want your next job to be?
- What do you like and dislike about your current (or most recent) job?
- Apart from the effects of the down economy, how happy are/were you in your job?
- Is/was your practice area a good fit for you?
- Does/did your work environment fit your personality and your needs for contact with people, time spent working alone, or work/life balance?
- How do you feel about a hierarchical structure and the use of such a structure in staff decisions made for participation in client cases and deals?
- Do you like research and writing? Are you good at giving presentations?

Then, take a look even further back.

- Why did you go to law school? What were you hoping to do with your law degree?
- If you were hoping to change the world in some small or large way, how many steps have you taken toward that goal?
- What values motivate you? Money? Power? Prestige? Working with good people? Praise?

There also are many popular self-assessment tools that can help you sort out your skills, values, and interests, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the Strong Interest Inventory. You can further consult books such as Deborah Arron's *What Can You Do with a Law Degree?*, Barbara Sher's *Wishcraft*, or Timothy Butler's *Getting Unstuck*, which can help you realize that the variety of career options within and outside of law is unlimited.

In addition to your own work on assessing your career, your law school career center can help you with the self-assessment process. Remember that once you have entered law school, your career center is yours to use for life. Larger career centers have a dedicated counselor for alumni. Use the centers for more than access to job postings.

After conducting an assessment of your current work situation, you may decide that a different path would lead to a happier work life for you. If this is your conclusion, you should identify some jobs that would better utilize your skills and interests. Then, you should locate the people who have those jobs and set up informational interviews. Again, your law school career center can help. You should target alumni of both your law school and your undergraduate institution and keep in mind that the more you have in common with these individuals the more likely that they will agree to meet with you.

During an informational interview, ask the following questions:

- What path did you take to where you are now?
- What is a typical day is like for you?
- What do you like and dislike about your job?
- Do you think I have the necessary experience and skills for this type of work?
- What professional organizations do you belong to and what law publications do you read?
- What is the typical salary range for your type of position?
- Is there anyone you know whom I could contact with more questions?

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Do not ask for a job. If interviewees like you and have an opening for which you would be qualified, they will let you know. Responding to job postings is fine but only after you have done the work outlined above and only when you acknowledge that your chance of finding a job from any one posting is minimal. The good news is that you have much support in these tough times, not only from your friends and family, but also from your larger network of people who have known you and your work. One of your first calls after a layoff or if you're feeling anxious about job security should be to your law school career center. While career counselors do not have a job drawer or a magic bullet, we excel at strategizing and helping you develop a game plan for the next step in your career.

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