



AboveTheLaw.com presents:

**A Legal Recruiting & Placement Roundtable Discussion w/
moderator David Lat**

Participants:



David Lat, Editor, Abovethelaw.com

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David Lat: What are the advantages of working with a headhunter? When searching for a job, some candidates attempt to go it alone, find jobs through networking, etc. What value do recruiters add to the job hunt process?

Marina Sirras: There are many advantages to working with recruiters – the most important is the recruiter’s extensive knowledge of the legal market and knowing not only their client’s practice but

“personality” and culture as well – one cannot get this information from the firm’s website. Recruiters will help with resume preparation, interview preparation and conduct the search under strict confidentiality without jeopardizing the candidate’s current job. Recruiters spend a great deal of time researching the legal market. Also, if a candidate is considering relocating, using a NALSC recruiter opens up a great network of ethical recruiters across the country.

Linda Pittleman: Candidates benefit greatly by discussing their goals and options with a reputable, experienced recruiter who knows the details of various types of positions and employers’ priorities. Also, candidates that we present to our clients enjoy the advantages of our relationships and ability to advocate on their behalf. Clients trust in the quality of our submissions because we meet most candidates and have a strong sense of their potential fit, not only on paper credentials but also on personal qualities and professional motivation. A good relationship with a search firm can save both the candidate and the employer tremendous time (which is money!) and greatly minimize the risk and resulting costs of an unsuccessful hire.

Steve Pittleman:

- **A top headhunter should have valuable, non-public information culled from years of talking with attorneys who are both happy and unhappy in a particular environment. It is this year after year information gathering that is a good recruiter’s most value asset.**
- **A good headhunter can be the best advocate for a candidate. With specific knowledge of what an employer is seeking (beyond the job specs), experience with what they have responded to in the past and an objective perspective on a candidate’s strengths in the marketplace, a top headhunter can present the strongest argument as to the strength of an individual’s candidacy for a particular job.**
- **The consistent follow-up necessary to keep the process from stalling on a hiring attorney’s desk is provided by a headhunter.**
- **Only a top recruiter has experience placing with a wide range of firm and non-firm environments that provides the necessary perspective to recommend the best employers for a particular candidate’s goals.**

- Top recruiters have know how to help candidates interview effectively so that the hiring attorneys, who are not trained interviewers, are sure to see what that candidate is actually bringing to the table.
- The best recruiters also have knowledge about how to best negotiate a compensation package with a particular employer.

Eden Mandrell: Searching for a new position can be a full-time job in itself – one that requires skill, knowledge, and experience.

Professional recruiters add value to the process by managing your search for you. We know the firms in each of our markets – their personalities and culture; their client base; and their expectations. A recruiter with a good reputation is going to be able to get attention and action, while the self-submissions languish in overstuffed in-boxes. A professional recruiter will also educate you. We have conversations with people every day covering almost every department of every firm, from hiring partners to first year associates. We know the landscape better than anyone. Additionally, using a recruiter doesn't cost anything and can help you avoid an ill-informed career decision. A good recruiter is a counselor and will help you develop your career plan and understand how to achieve your goals.

David Lat: The job search process can be a confusing one. What general advice would you give to lawyers looking to make a career transition?

Linda Pittleman: It is important to keep an open mind. Candidates will sometimes attach to a particular type of position as the ideal without thinking through at a deeper level what they are really trying to accomplish with a career move. We therefore try to help peel away the layers of the onion to determine what will provide true job satisfaction. This can be a lengthy process, which brings me to a second piece of advice – start considering your next move before you have to. Take the time to learn the various types of practice environments, consider carefully what you would keep or change in your current position, and then when you then decide – or need – to make a move, you will be ready with strong market knowledge and a clearer vision for your future.

Marina Sirras: The best advice is to be sure they are making the decision for the right reasons. We thoroughly interview candidates to determine why they are looking to change careers - is it their current situation, people with whom they work, the work, the hours? Do they wish to stay in the legal industry? If practicing law is the issue, law firms now offer great career opportunities on the administration side. We recruit JDs for Professional Development, Recruiting, Practice Manager, Law Firm Marketing, Business Development, Knowledge Management, Legal Personnel, Campus Relations Managers etc. These are administration and not professional staff jobs.

Steve Pittleman: The first advice I give to anyone beginning a job search is to identify what their priorities are in a new job. What are the qualities they want in a new environment that are not being satisfied now? What are the qualities in their present environment that they do not want to give up? Once a candidate has a good sense of their priorities, it is easy to identify the jobs that best meet them, to have a clear focus for the search and a prism through which to evaluate the interviews. To simply apply to a list of openings that match a candidate's background and then to collect job offers is what typically leads to confusion and even more importantly, poor decisions based on what often turn out to be superficial factors.

Eden Mandrell: One of the first things we advise is a thorough evaluation of your long-term goals and objectives. Where do you want to be in 5 years? In 10 years? Do you aspire to partnership? In-house? Public service? Your personality and values are part of the success formula, so don't weight others' experiences too heavily. While an opportunity might be the right fit for one person, it might be a disastrous experience for another. Finally, when conducting your search and making the transition, always conduct yourself in a professional manner. You never know whose path you might cross down the road.

David Lat: What are the differences between working in-house versus working at a law firm? What are the pros and cons of each?

Steve Pittleman: Having worked in both settings and placed in both for the past 20 years, I am going to over-generalize, but, with that

caveat, I would say that a law firm is best for an attorney who either enjoys having the time to dig into his or her area of law in great depth or one who wants to be in control of his or her own compensation and believes he or she can develop a book of business. In contrast, in house is usually best for an attorney who wants to apply his or her legal expertise within a business setting to solve day to day business problems. In house requires attorneys who thrive in a team-oriented environment. For an attorney who can work well within a corporate structure and who enjoys a fast-paced environment presenting very wide-ranging issues and responsibilities, in house can be a great fit.

Linda Pittleman: In years past, the clear dividing line between in-house and law firm environments was lifestyle – in-house was seen as an escape from the long hours and pressures of big firm life. To some extent, this is still the case, but as in-house departments have become more leanly staffed, hours have definitely increased. On the other hand, law firms were often seen as the environment of choice for attorneys seeking the most sophisticated, cutting edge work, but this distinction has also become blurred as in-house departments are handling more key matters internally. One difference that has become more pronounced with the jump in big firm associates' salaries is compensation; candidates from big firms usually need to take a cut in pay to go in-house and the differential varies greatly, depending on the industry. Another ongoing distinction is in the relationship with the business client; attorneys who enjoy focusing strategically on one client's needs usually prefer in-house settings where they can become an integral, day to day member of the business team.

Marina Sirras: Well, we often hear that in-house attorneys are happier than their friends who are in private practice. There is a perception that in-house positions offer a more predictable lifestyle – however, not always less hours. Although there are no billable hour requirements, many in-house lawyers in large corporations keep track of their hours for budgeting purposes. In a law firm, the work may be more cutting-edge and for a variety of clients as opposed to in-house where you have one client – the company. Depending on size of the law department, an in-house lawyer may only supervise outside counsel, not do the day-to-day legal work.

Eden Mandrell: Essentially, by moving in-house, attorneys are giving up billable hours. Before you start your happy dance, there are other things you need to be aware of. You may be expected to become more specialized, and the scope of your work may narrow significantly. In-house legal departments used to farm out a lot of their legal work but are now keeping it in-house, meaning that their attorneys are expected to work just as hard as their law firm-counterparts. However, going in-house can be a great way to develop a business skill-set, which can ultimately help someone transition out of the practice of law, if that is a goal. Interestingly enough, we've had several candidates who practice in-house come to us recently saying that they want to go back to a law firm because they found that they were working just as hard and making less money. Going in-house isn't for everyone – again, self-evaluation and long-term career goals are really important in making the decision as to whether you're better suited for a law firm or an in-house legal department.

David Lat: The legal profession is experiencing a great deal of change right now, due to such factors as technology and the evolving economy. What trends do you see emerging in the market for legal services?

Eden Mandrell: We've found that our clients are moving associates from slower practices to more active departments. Billable hours are being scrutinized in far greater detail, and deals are being staffed more leanly. Firms are hiring staff attorneys, rather than utilizing their associates to handle document review and production, so as to keep their client bills down. In-house clients have been outsourcing less of their legal work to firms, keeping it in-house to reduce costs. We recommend that our candidates develop a broader skill-set, so as to not become too niched, particularly in the transactional areas.

Steve Pittleman: Frankly, the biggest impact technology has had on the legal profession is that it is even more 24/7 than before. As a result, lifestyle issues are driving even more attorneys' career plans and there are still far fewer lifestyle alternatives in the profession than there were 10 or 20 years ago. The growth of alternative work

schedules within larger institutions and of smaller firms with different corporate cultures is a need that eventually will be satisfied. Conversely, the trend toward globalization and continued consolidation is far from over. Therefore, there will be continued movement toward finding the best platform from which to service one's existing clients and to develop new ones.

Linda Pittleman: A pervasive trend is the use of the internet for candidate recruitment. I see this tool as a double edged sword. On the one hand, internet ads can be useful to identify candidates in an unusual practice specialties or geographic areas or to attract candidates not reached through other methods. Also, many employers advertise on the web, hoping to avoid a search fee. While these can be successful strategies, they cannot replace the value of person to person recruiting by search firms. First, internet ads often yield numerous resumes from unqualified candidates and it takes time to sort them out. Second, choosing simply on the basis of a resume and perhaps a follow-up phone conversation risks wasting the employer's and the candidate's time because the overall fit may not be right. Finally, internet ads miss altogether many of the most sought after and attractive candidates – those who are happy where they are and not seeking another position on the web.

Marina Sirras: Technology has enabled law firms to become much more efficient and in turn much more productive. E-discovery and document review can often be handled by contract or temp lawyers or even outsourced to litigation support firms or overseas to places such as India. Because of higher billing rates for partners and associates, some firms have hired staff attorneys to do some of the time-intensive work. Clients are demanding efficiency and some law firm clients have told law firms not to train first years on their case or deal. Technology has also enabled companies to take work, in-house- for example, trademark.

David Lat: What practice areas are hot right now?

Marina Sirras: Partners in any practice area with portable business are hot – actually they're not a practice area are they? Project Finance, energy, Intellectual property (litigation or transactional) are

practices very much in demand. Corporate and Finance and we even have some good positions for structured finance. International practices especially Asian and Latin America with Brazil being of interest to the top firms. Litigation is holding ground- bankruptcy not as busy. Junior positions –there are many jobs available, however, the clients are being more selective, and the process is taking a bit longer than it has in the past few years.

Eden Mandrell: Generally, we're seeing a lot of activity on the transactional side – our clients have been asking us to help them recruit attorneys in the hedge fund and venture capital sectors, as well as private equity and fund formation. Intellectual property litigation and prosecution continue to remain hot practice areas, particularly for candidates with a technical degree (BSEE, BSCS). We've also seen a strong need for ERISA and midlevel tax attorneys. Employment counseling has picked up, and litigation and bankruptcy remain steady. In the Texas markets, particularly Houston, we've seen a strong demand for Oil and Gas/Energy associates, and that area seems to be growing in other markets, too. Our 21 market view shows that there aren't as many large trends as there are local ones.

Steve Pittleman: Law firms are using this time to focus on partner hiring, particularly of corporate partners with hedge or private equity fund clients, white-collar litigators and real estate attorneys with reliable books of business. At the associate level, the greatest demand is for mid-level associates with corporate transactional experience, good "hands on" litigation or bankruptcy experience or a broad traditional real estate practice.

Linda Pittleman: The recent economic downturn has certainly affected the overall volume of attorney hiring and among the hardest hit are the various corporate specialties directly servicing Wall Street. Fortunately, for in-house hiring, we are still seeing some good hiring activity in other areas including entertainment, tax and ERISA/employment. Of course, the specialty that usually thrives in a down market is bankruptcy.

David Lat: Aside from practice area, how would you describe the types of candidates who are most in-demand by employers? What qualities do they typically possess?

Linda Pittleman: For in-house, attorneys with about 5-7 years of strong experience in a given practice area are particularly desirable. Employers hiring through recruiting firms usually require top academics and prior experience with a prestigious law firm or corporation, but can have flexibility when attorneys offer solid practical experience in hard to find niche areas. Finally, the importance of personal presentation and “chemistry” with the potential employer cannot be overstated. The candidate who can confidently and clearly articulate a match with the employer’s needs has a huge advantage. This is especially true for in-house, where attorneys practice on the “front lines” with colleagues and the business team.

Steve Pittleman: Clearly, every employer wants an attorney who is smart, hard-working and accommodating with a proven record of success. However, an employer also wants a candidate who is clear about what they are looking for in a job and about what they bring to the table. An employer wants to be confident that he or she can satisfy what is motivating the candidate to seek a new job and that they have a clear sense of the candidate’s strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, a candidate must be completely sincere, open and forthcoming.

Eden Mandrell: The qualities of candidates most often in demand by employers tend to be those with strong academics, have served Federal Clerkships, and who are a cultural fit with the firm. Diversity is very important to our clients, as is a candidate’s employment history. Firms are paying more attention to how many moves a candidate has made. They’re looking for long-term stability and loyalty. Lately, firms have put a premium on candidates who are fluent (both speaking and writing) in other languages; including Japanese, Mandarin, Spanish and Portuguese. For intellectual property attorneys, firms have been asking for candidates with dual degrees, and in many cases, candidates with a Ph.D. or MS. Our London recruiters are frequently asked for U.S.-trained candidates with securities-related experience.

Marina Sirras: Candidates with strong experience and top academic credentials who have not jumped from job to job are very attractive.

Our clients look for candidates who are well-rounded, who our client feels will be able to grow professionally and bring value to the firm. Leadership quality - not necessarily that the candidate can bring his/her own business someday, but he or she can be a leader or mentor to more junior associates. Language skills – fluency in a foreign language such as Portuguese or Spanish and provide a distinctive skill, such as language fluency.

David Lat: In terms of the candidates that you place, what are their priorities when choosing between prospective employers?

Steve Pittleman: Each candidate's priorities are surprisingly unique. A particular candidate's top priority may be lifestyle, compensation, security, room for advancement, strength in a particular sub-specialty, breadth of practice, size of department, reputation of firm, willingness to re-train or even location. Regardless, all of these factors need to be weighed. However, the most important factor ultimately for 99% of candidates is the chemistry with the people with whom they will be working.

Eden Mandrell: Our candidates have become far more diligent when choosing between prospective employers. They ask about client rosters; they want to know that they'll be exposed to sophisticated work and that the firm's deal flow will be strong and consistent. Candidates also place a lot of weight on the employers' culture and environment. They ask to meet with everyone from the chair of the department to the administrative staff. Candidates have become increasingly concerned about diversity as an indicator of an open and stimulating culture. Candidates who are concerned about partnership prospects look to see how many other attorneys are in their class and how deals are staffed. In today's market, candidates are savvier about their long-term career goals than ever before.

Marina Sirras: Most candidates are looking for a better job than their current one. They often look for a place where they will continue to grow professionally; one that will offer new opportunities. Priorities are such an individual thing. For some "better" means more regular hours due to responsibilities or demands outside of work; for others better means more 'hands on' experience. It is difficult to make a

generalization, because our candidates have such diverse needs and wants.

Linda Pittleman: Candidates vary in their specific priorities, but among the most common are the desire to increase compensation, focus on specific practice areas, decrease hours, enhance opportunities for advancement in title/responsibility, join a more collegial department, or move to a more stable organization. That said, the underlying motivator we have noticed with most candidates over the years is the desire to work in organizations where they will be valued as professionals and also on a basic human level.

David Lat: What about attorneys looking to go into the recruiting business? What advice would you offer to them?

Eden Mandrell: Recruiting is a great alternative to practicing law, so long as you have the right expectations. We welcome candidates who are naturally gregarious and confident, who understand the art of networking, and enjoy advising and counseling others. Recruiting is primarily a relationship-building profession. Successful recruiters tend to be patient, quick learners, good multitaskers, and natural extroverts. New recruiters should realize that the profession is constantly shifting, so what the business is like now is not the same way it will look in 6 months, let alone 5 years from now! You must be adaptable and really enjoy working with people. This really is a job where you can make a huge impact on many lives and careers!

Marina Sirras: I am very honest with them. I tell them that it's a very good business but it's not for everyone. To make sure that they are in a position to not see a commission for some months. Usually this is anywhere from three to six months and sometimes even longer. Must be a "people person" and a good listener, be proactive is very important as is being able to call strangers. Most important is being able to take rejection-being thick skinned is a big plus!

Linda Pittleman: Legal recruiting can be a wonderful profession for attorneys to utilize their legal backgrounds in a "people intensive" environment. Many attorneys are also drawn to the better work/life balance recruiting can offer relative to the practice of law.

However, top quality recruiters need to develop and sustain strong

relationships with candidates and clients, requiring a great deal of time and a very thick skin! The hiring process can be very sensitive for candidates and clients alike and therefore the capacity to listen closely and respectfully, the integrity to convey information or advice that may cause some resistance and the ability to put your own ego aside are critical qualities. The best recruiters also take a long range view of the placement process – rather than seeking a quick fee, they earn the trust of all parties by placing candidates where they can truly thrive and add value.

Steve Pittleman: I believe very strongly that an attorney who wants to become a recruiter should sincerely want to learn the significant amount of information necessary to provide value-add counsel to candidates and not simply want a flex-time job for lawyers. I came into this industry from practice more than 20 years ago because I believed there was a need for a more professional level of counsel. Unfortunately, since then, I have seen many attorneys come into the industry to earn commissions from placing former colleagues without really knowing enough to help those attorneys make the best long-term choices for their legal careers with very unfortunate life consequences.

A good recruiter also must be a self-starter. Most attorneys I have trained over the years didn't realize how reactive practice is most of the time and how different it is to have your livelihood depend completely on what you make happen. However, for those who like building close relationships with highly talented attorneys to help them make major life decisions, it's exceptionally rewarding.