

# How to Select the Best Legal Recruiter and Maximize the Effectiveness of Working with One

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## Introduction

One of the misunderstood facets of the legal-recruiting industry is the following: You have many options when choosing a legal recruiter (not just the one that cold-called you), and how well you work with your legal recruiter will directly influence how successful the legal recruiter is in working with you.

If you have ever spent any serious time in Hollywood, you have undoubtedly come across numerous people with agents. When you speak to someone with an agent, he/she often talks about things he/she told his/her agent:

"I told my agent I do not like this kind of part because of X."

"My agent says that if I wait about six months, a part with X may open up."

"My agent knows my personal obligations and is not going to allow me to work with X director because he is too demanding."

Similarly, the more time you spend with someone with an agent, the more you realize that he/she is communicating with that agent all the time. Frankly, if any of these people with agents are your friends, it can get pretty annoying. Their cell phones are ringing during lunch with calls from their agents. They need to

call their agents during lunch, and so on. If you go to any group social functions with your friends who have agents, the agents are very likely to be there. There- instead of using cell phones-the agents and their clients will be seen talking in corners frequently.

The reason we tell you all of this is that in the entertainment industry, the people with agents have it figured out that the more they communicate with their agents, the more likely they are going to be to find their perfect matches in terms of what they are seeking in their careers. The client and agent also establish a working and friendly professional relationship where the agent constantly knows about what is going on with his/her client, both personally and professionally.

In the legal industry, there are a few select attorneys (less than 1%) whose skills are good enough that they need agents, just like famous actors and actresses do in places like Hollywood. Admittedly, the legal-recruiting industry is much different from Hollywood; however, in both cases the agents and legal recruiters are working with people who, if they are not stars, have tremendous potential. The job of a legal recruiter is to sell your potential to legal employers, whether law firms or companies.

If you have worked with a recruiter in the past, you likely have a pretty good idea of how the process works. If you haven't yet worked with a recruiter, the idea of placing your career in somebody's hands may seem rather daunting and scary. Regardless of which category you fall into, it is important to know that if you are able to use a legal recruiter, our goals are the same: to help you get a job where you and the company will both be happy. In this regard, here are some ways you can ensure that you choose the best recruiter and maximize the

effectiveness of working with your recruiter.

## HOW TO SELECT THE BEST LEGAL RECRUITER FOR YOUR NEEDS

***You do not need to use the first recruiter that calls you.*** There are a plethora of recruiters to choose from regarding your search for a better opportunity. And all are not created equal. We are amazed by how often attorneys decide to place their careers in a virtually unknown recruiter's hands just because a particular recruiter was the first to cold-call them about an opportunity. Often, when we ask attorneys the names of their former recruiters, they frequently respond to the effect of "I don't even remember the person's name" or "I only spoke to the person once, and he/she forwarded my resume to a bunch of places, and I never heard back from him/her."

It is important to realize that just because a particular recruiter calls you does not mean that he/she is the only person working on the search for a company. Unless the recruiter has an exclusive on the search, it is likely that numerous recruiters are working on the search, and you definitely have a choice as to whom you want to work with. Similar to buying a house-you do not need to work with the first real estate agent that you come in contact with. And feel free to interview multiple recruiters as well.

***How do you select the best legal recruiter for your needs?*** Now that you understand that there are numerous options in terms of choosing a recruiter, here are some things you should consider when choosing a recruiter.

First, do you feel comfortable speaking to the recruiter about your ideal job and career dreams? Do you feel that the recruiter is interested in getting to know you

and your most important priorities, or is the recruiter merely trying to sell you on the particular job he/she is calling about?

Second, is the recruiter reputable? Is the recruiter with an established company that you can easily research? Can you research the individual recruiter's educational and professional backgrounds? Also, just as attorneys are guided by ethics committees and the state bar, recruiters are guided by and disciplined by the National Association of Legal Search Consultants ("NALSC"). It is important to do your due diligence and find out if a recruiter or company is a member of NALSC. To view the NALSC code of ethics, the website link is <http://www.nalsc.org/about/ethics.cfm>

Third, does the recruiter spend a significant amount of his/her practice cold calling? This is an important consideration for the following reason. If a recruiter cold-calls attorneys all day, this recruiter must have certain companies that he/she "places in" and some that he/she "calls into." Companies will not work with recruiters who cold-call into them because this is considered "double dipping" and is highly frowned upon. Thus, if a recruiter calls into a fraction of the companies in a city (and these companies are obviously not companies that the recruiter can make placements in), the recruiter has access to only a fraction of the opportunities in the given city. On the other hand, if the recruiter does not spend much time cold calling and works off of referrals or candidates initiating contact, this recruiter will have access to many more opportunities.

Fourth, if you are searching for a position in a particular environment, such as a corporate in-house position, be sure to confirm that the recruiter has experience with placements in such positions. Some recruiters try to do a little bit of everything, while others specialize in certain types of positions. A recruiter who

specializes in the type of position that you seek will be better able to place you in a position that matches your interests.

Fifth, a referral from a fellow attorney is a great way to find a recruiter. If somebody you know and trust has had a positive experience with a particular recruiter in the past, this should be given substantial weight.

***Candidates Who Work with One Recruiter Typically Have the Most Success and the Least Chance of Getting "Bounced" as a Result of Dual Submissions.*** While you are certainly free to use as many recruiters as you want and it may seem tempting to have several different recruiters cover the market, it is common knowledge in the industry that candidates who work with one recruiter have an overwhelmingly higher rate of success than those that use several recruiters.

There are some definite benefits of working with just one recruiter. As an initial matter, working with one recruiter eliminates the possibility of a "double submission." More often than you'd like to think, attorneys who use multiple recruiters often do not keep the best notes or records of where they have applied in the past six months. (The six-month period is the industry standard for determining who has priority. In other words, if you or a recruiter submitted your materials to a company on January 1, another recruiter should not submit you to that same company until, at the least, after July 1). In these situations, there is a heightened risk that you may inadvertently authorize two recruiters to submit you to the same company within a six-month period. If this happens, even if you have stellar credentials and your experience is right on target, a company will reject you for two reasons. First, the company will do anything to avoid getting into a fee dispute with two separate recruiting companies and will

find it much easier to reject the candidate. (Remember, this same rationale applies if you apply to a company directly on your own and then to the same company through a recruiter within a six-month period.) Also, if a submission is received from two different sources, it sends the signal that the candidate is either disorganized or somewhat desperate for a job.

Furthermore, working with one recruiter allows you to have a consistent coach, confidant, and cheerleader in your corner at all times and can help keep you on track in light of your stated goals and priorities. We have also found that you will likely feel more comfortable opening up and providing a greater deal of information if you have a solid relationship with one recruiter, which is crucial to the process. Importantly, if a recruiter knows about all of your different interviews, he/she can often use the information to generate and maintain interest from various companies. Furthermore, companies are more likely to actively pursue a candidate when a recruiter appears to have thoroughly screened the candidate and is fully aware of the ins and outs of a candidate's situation.

In short, because a recruiter is somewhat akin to an air traffic controller, the more information a recruiter has, the better he/she is able to expertly survey your job landscape, keep you on track, and effectively manage and coordinate your search with you to make sure it is as smooth as possible.

***Once you have selected a recruiter, what should he/she be doing to assist with your search?*** The recruiter you work with should always write a detailed cover letter on your behalf to the companies. The cover letter should discuss, at a minimum:

- Why you are considering a move;

- Your interest in the specific company
- Your academic achievements;
- A very detailed description of your work experience (which goes beyond what is merely in your resume);
- Why you have made certain job changes in the past, with provided explanations;
- Any special accolades or characteristics that may set you apart from your peers; and
- Any other relevant personal information.

We strongly believe that one of the biggest advantages of using a recruiter is that a recruiter can tell your story in a unique way, brag on your behalf (without your appearing conceited), and-most of all-answer any questions that somebody reviewing your resume might have at first blush (e.g., Why is the person looking? Why did he/she leave the last job after only one year? Why did he/she get two C's during the last semester of law school?). In fact, we feel so strongly that a comprehensive cover letter is crucial to your candidacy that we do not present any candidates without at least a several-page cover letter.

Many recruiting coordinators have privately confessed that they routinely reject candidates when their submissions do not have explanations about certain potential red flags. Oftentimes, a mere explanation can make all the difference. In the words of one recruiting coordinator at a very well regarded law firm: "It is amazing how, when we have so many resumes and need to narrow our pile, we just reject flat-out those candidates that don't have explanations for all our questions and interview those that do."

Importantly, telling your story verbally does little to truly help your candidacy in the long run because, although maybe the recruiting coordinator or one partner



may have the explanation, odds are that the other five or six people reviewing your resume will not be privy to the same explanation and could draw the same adverse conclusions.

Many recruiters, unfortunately, are focused primarily on sending out as many submissions as possible to increase their chances of making a placement and, therefore, spend a minimum amount of time on submissions. If a recruiter merely emails or faxes a resume to a company with little or no background information, you are losing out on perhaps the biggest advantage of using a recruiter. In those cases, you would likely be better off just sending your resume yourself.

Lastly, your recruiter should ask you for a deal sheet, or significant transactions sheet, if you are a corporate, securities, real estate, or tax attorney. If you are a litigator, you should provide the recruiter with a couple of writing samples. The recruiter should have examples of deal sheets, depending on your practice area, to assist with your detailed transaction list. The writing sample should be something recent and almost entirely your own work product. After you have done a full read through on your writing samples, your recruiter should offer to read your writing sample before he/she submits you to the company. We have found that about 90% of the candidates submit writing samples that have at least one typo. That grammatical error or spelling mistake can make or break your candidacy with a company when you are competing against another attorney of equal qualifications, personality, and experience. It also helps to have a recruiter who is a former attorney review your writing sample or review your deal sheet. These individuals are most familiar with the work product that partners and associates are interested in reviewing and will understand, if applicable, how to make your deal sheet or writing sample better.



## **NOW THAT YOU HAVE THE RIGHT RECRUITER, HERE ARE SOME WAYS YOU CAN MAXIMIZE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THAT RECRUITER.**

***Help Us Get to Know You, Not Only as an Attorney, but as a Person.*** We strongly believe that the better we know you, the more effective we are in helping with your needs. As recruiters, we came into this profession because we love working with and helping people. Almost all of our recruiters are attorneys who left practicing law because they simply preferred talking to fellow attorneys about their careers and issues that were more personal in nature. Talking to people is our passion, and if it weren't, we would not be able to spend hours upon hours speaking to and helping you with one of the most important transitions in your life. While we certainly need to know your professional story (e.g., why you are looking for a new position, your professional experience, etc.), we also enjoy getting to know you as a person as well. For example, what do you like the most in your practice? The least? Why did you decided to practice law? Why are you continuing to practice law? Who is your inspiration? Were you the first person in your family to attend law school? What makes you unique? Is there anything else going on in your life that will affect your search? What is the biggest challenge you are facing in your career? This deeper level of communication is extremely helpful for us.

***If Possible, Try to Meet Your Recruiter in Person.*** If you are in the same city as your recruiter, meeting face-to-face-whether for a cup of coffee or in the office for a more formal meeting-can only help the process. We find that when we meet our candidates in person, it is much more conducive to developing stronger, more trusting, and overall more successful relationships that yield

more positive results.

***Information That You Think Hurts You May Not Always Be as Bad as You Think.*** Candidates are often surprised to learn that what they believe are deal-breaking black marks on their resumes may be more common than they think and can often be explained to the company's satisfaction once we are able to hear the story and learn the truth of the entire situation. The worst thing a candidate can do is try to withhold or omit important information because, in accordance with Murphy's Law, the information will eventually be found out, and the damage caused from withholding of the information is often much greater than the damage that would have been caused by simply providing the information up front.

***It is Okay to Brag About Yourself.*** One of the significant advantages of using a recruiter is that a recruiter can showcase and brag about you in ways that you can't. Although you may feel slightly uncomfortable if we ask you to highlight your achievements and all the positive things you've done, this type of information gives us the tools to highlight your key strengths to companies. Tell us about all the positive praise and comments you've received; show us all of your letters of recommendation; tell us about all your achievements and all those other things that make you secretly so proud. Don't worry, we won't think you're conceited; and the companies will appreciate knowing this information.

***The More We Know About Your Entire Job Search, Including Where You Have Applied in the Past, the Better We Will Be Able to Help You*** One of the first questions we ask our candidates is "Where have you applied in the past six months?" There are several reasons we ask this important question. First, as noted above, we want to be absolutely sure to steer clear of any companies you

have already contacted directly within the past six months.

We've seen candidates who feel hesitant to let us know that they may be looking for jobs in several cities at once or that they have already applied to several companies on their own or through another recruiter. Don't worry about it. We know that there are many different options when it comes to a job search, and we have been in your shoes ourselves. However, letting us know everywhere you have previously applied (for at least the past six months) will help ensure that we do not submit you to a company where you have already applied. In short, the more information we have about your situation, the better we are able to help you through the process.

***Take Advantage of Your Expertise, and Be Open and Honest with Us.*** We are experts in helping attorneys find jobs. We love to answer questions and provide guidance. While you are busy writing briefs, we are researching the market. Take advantage of what we know and what we can share with you. Don't be afraid to ask questions you may think are obvious.

Also, if you have certain specific expectations that are important to you, let us know. And if we are not meeting your expectations in any way, please let us know that as well. Working with a recruiter is a two-way relationship-it requires open communication, honesty, and clearly defined expectations.

***Stay in Contact with Your Recruiter.*** Your job search is an extremely important time for you. When you are working with a legal recruiter, everything about what the legal recruiter is doing for you is about you. In addition, your job search is an important life event for you. Because you are in the midst of an important life event, it is important that you are always communicating with your

legal recruiter at all times.

Many candidates sit around and wait for their recruiters to contact them. While no one likes to be bothered unnecessarily, you need to realize that your legal recruiter works for you. Because your legal recruiter works for you, it is important that you provide your recruiter the direction he/she needs in order to do his/her job as effectively as possible. In most cases, this will mean letting the recruiter know what you are feeling and thinking about your job search at all times.

Most of our recruiters work extremely hard. In fact, the majority of our recruiters work between 10 and 12 hours a day. While our recruiters devote time to all of their candidates, candidates with more pronounced immediate needs are generally going to receive the majority of the recruiter's time first. What this means, however, is that a recruiter must know the urgency of your particular job search.

As recruiters, we have worked with numerous types of candidates. Some candidates may decide they are not in a hurry to move, but will consider better offers if they come along. Other candidates are in a hurry to move and want to get out of their present employment situations immediately. Some candidates are in between. In order for recruiters to do their jobs as effectively as possible, it is important that you stay in touch with them at all times and let them know precisely what is going on with your particular situation and your desire to pursue more openings, for example. Legal recruiters are not mind readers and may need to be prodded at times if your job search increases in urgency.

***Respect Your Legal Recruiter.*** Attorneys have different views of legal

recruiters. Some attorneys realize and understand that legal recruiting at its very highest level is something that merits a great deal of respect. Other attorneys have different views of legal recruiters based on prior bad experiences. While the point of this article is not to convince you that legal recruiting is a serious profession, you do need to understand that it is important that you respect your legal recruiter. Your legal recruiter is in an advisory role that will have an effect over the course of your career.

Throughout the years, we have seen numerous types of personalities of different attorneys. We would estimate that more than 95% of the attorneys we have worked with have been absolute pleasures to work with. However, occasionally, the rare personality comes along that will lie, withhold important information, or even be blatantly disrespectful. The same rules of decorum that govern your other professional relationships should also be found in your relationship with your legal recruiter, because they work to your advantage. When you respect your legal recruiter, he/she will feel empowered to exert a great deal of effort on your behalf and enjoy doing so. No one likes to feel disrespected, and this includes your legal recruiter as well.

***It is Important to Do What You Say You Are Going to Do and Say What You Mean.*** Every time a legal recruiter takes on a new candidate and submits that candidate to a law firm or company, the legal recruiter's credibility is on the line with the law firm or company he/she is submitting you to.

Most of our legal recruiters are speaking with companies in major cities on a daily basis. When a legal recruiter is representing you, his/her job is to assist companies along in making hiring decisions. Accordingly, positive information you may share with your legal recruiter about a given company or interview will

likely be passed along to the company. If you are not telling the truth about this sort of thing, you risk harming the credibility of your legal recruiter.

In addition, if you go into your job search with the objective of achieving a certain result and decide later that you no longer want that result, you should share this information with your recruiter so that your recruiter's credibility is not unnecessarily harmed.

## **Conclusion**

Now that you know how to choose the best legal recruiter for your needs and how to maximize the effectiveness of working with that recruiter, you should be confident that your chances of landing your next position will increase significantly. Good luck!