

Chapter 4:

Framing your career and designing an effective job search

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Think of a framed painting. It's a square shape and the frame may be gilded and about two inches thick. That's the image I want you to keep in mind as we explore your career. The exterior perimeter of the frame is your job search. The interior perimeter contains your constraints in evaluating the right career. The painting inside is the career you design.

The exterior frame – parameters of your job search

Job seekers come from many vantage points. You may be an entry-level lawyer or an employed lawyer seeking to work in a new practice area or type of job. Perhaps you're a re-entry lawyer who has left the profession for one or more years, due to child-rearing. Or, maybe you're a lawyer in transition who was laid off or declined to move when your company relocated. You could also be a lawyer in transition because you are a trailing spouse or partner seeking a new job in a new city. Like the four corners of a picture frame, there are four parameters that will help you evaluate your career options – your strengths, interests, market need, and investment.

Strengths

There may be many areas that you are considering pursuing for a new job. You want to envision a large canvas first and then narrow in as you clarify your focus. In an initial assessment, it's helpful to think where you have strengths. For example, if you are a strong writer and presenter, litigation may be a practice area valuable for you to consider. Maybe you are drawn to a transactional practice because you are good at drafting and negotiating contracts. Identify your strengths and use them as a guide. In doing so, pay attention to what others seek you out for too as this is often a natural indicator of your strengths.

Interests

While it's important to pursue areas where you are talented, you also want to make sure that you're interested in the work. People often mistake strengths and interests. Let's say privacy and real estate are two practice areas that are interesting to you. Next, you would want to evaluate what aspects of these practice areas you could align with your strengths.

You may not know what interests you and where your strengths lie. In such cases, it may take some trial and error and exploring different practice areas to see what you naturally enjoy. Often, it won't be until you try various practice areas, roles, and workplaces that you figure out what is fitting for you. It is important to push yourself to try different things and be willing to take calculated risks. I often see lawyers paralyzed by their job searches because they are afraid their next move may not be perfect. However, after a particularly long job search, or if you have been out of the market for an extended period of time, it often is more important to get reengaged with work, even if it's not the best job, long-term. Also, pay attention to what you read and do and volunteer in when you're not working. These pursuits may be good indicators of other areas you should consider. For those of you who are currently employed and vacillating about whether to stay or go, ask yourself if you would want your boss' job if it were offered to you. If the answer is no, that is usually a sign that you should consider making a move. If you would want another job in your current company, it may be worth staying and seeing how you could position yourself for a new job at the same company.

The women lawyers I work with, although focused on their interests, are often more focused on finding meaning and purpose in their work. Those who have had less linear careers have had the opportunity to pause and reflect not only on what can pay the bills but also where they can make a contribution that is bigger than themselves. Millennial lawyers are also prioritizing meaning and purpose in their job pursuits more than their predecessors.

Another consideration that many lawyers face is whether they want to stay in the legal field in a non-practising role. The opportunities here range considerably from being a professor, career advisor or administrator at a law school; filling professional development or diversity roles at law firms; being a legal recruiter; and many more. Many lawyers also make the choice of not practising law and working outside of the profession.

Market need

While strengths and interests are important components in considering your next move, market need is also critical to assess. You want to

research the types of employers that are hiring lawyers with your skillset and the types of roles that are available. Perhaps you have very good litigation skills and you are interested in privacy litigation but currently the market need for lawyers in privacy is more in the corporate context and not in litigation. Or, maybe you really want to work in an in-house legal department and litigation roles in-house are already limited, and in the privacy context, in-house legal departments are only seeking transactional lawyers with strong drafting and negotiating skills.

Getting an understanding of what experience and areas of substantive expertise are most attractive to prospective employers is an essential factor that will directly impact the success of your search. As you reflect on your next job, you will need to consider which employers are hiring lawyers with your experience. Is it a large law firm, a medium/regional or small firm or a solo practice that is the best fit? Are the opportunities instead in legal departments, not-for-profits, or in government? These questions lead to the last key area you need to evaluate in identifying the parameters of your job search.

Investment

Investment in a career can mean many different things but the focus is on how much money and time it will take to get you positioned for success in your search and whether it is realistic to make that investment to pursue your next move. If you are a litigator seeking to do privacy work in-house, is it worth seeing if you can transition at your law firm to the corporate group to learn contract drafting and negotiating in the privacy context to gain the relevant experience to go in-house? Making that inquiry may take some risk and perhaps it will require another two years of learning corporate drafting skills before applying for an in-house role. Even then, without in-house experience, it may be hard to make the transition from a law firm.

If you're a re-entry lawyer, you will also want to consider the investment of returning to a practice area and work environment you know, versus exploring an entirely new substantive area of law or work environment. While the investment will be greater to start in a new area, you might not want to return to your old practice area or work environment and you'll want to focus on what transferable skills you have and what other experience you have gained outside of work that you may be able to parlay into a new area. In making a practice area or work environment transition, you will need to be mindful that it may result in less income, at least on a short-term basis, and you will want to be sure that this is something you can manage.

Investment of time is one part but it is often also about investment of money. You will need to evaluate taking on various expenses, including networking organizations, conferences, enhanced LinkedIn membership, skills courses, continuing legal education courses, bar memberships, bar association dues, new clothes, and entertainment. You will need to consider whether these are worthwhile investments and how much is too much? If you are returning to work, your expenses may include hiring a babysitter or increasing your babysitter's hours before you secure a job.

The interior frame – constraints of your job search

Strengths, interests, market need, and investment are concepts that give you a broad brush picture of the initial scope of your search. Next you will want to consider the constraints – the four corners of the interior of the frame – that will bring your picture into clearer focus. These are competition, compensation/title, geography, and work/life.

The job-seeking process requires self-awareness and paying attention to where you fit into the market. Evaluating the constraints of your search will tap into your self-awareness to a greater degree and require you to delve into what is really important to you and where the definitive lines are that you need to draw.

Competition

You may have identified your strengths and interests as well as the market need and your willingness to invest in the process. But if the competition is too steep for the types of roles you are seeking, then you may not be setting yourself up for a realistic pursuit. For example, if you're a law firm litigator seeking a transactional privacy role in-house and you're seeing that all the lawyers in those roles have at least five years of law firm transactional privacy experience before going in-house, you may have to adjust your plan. That said, while it's important to be realistic about the competition, you want to be careful not to be preemptively defeated by it. Instead, pursue opportunities that are within your reach as well as being a stretch.

Compensation/title

Many people have minimum salary expectations that they have to meet to entertain a certain job. That will dictate the types of jobs and venues for work that they pursue. Accompanying the monetary concerns is the degree of risk and security that a certain job opportunity may have. For example, are you interested in a start-up environment but you

can't assume the risk due to familial financial responsibilities? Or, if an exciting job opportunity comes up but it requires you to work on a temporary basis first to help you secure a transition in-house, is that a risk you can take? These are difficult decisions that require thoughtful consideration. Over the last 20 years, I have seen more lawyers taking these sorts of risks as the market has become more forgiving of less linear careers. Lawyers are also seeing that having more short-term flexibility in pursuing their careers may give them better long-term options.

For some, title can also be a limiting factor. In evaluating opportunities that involve title, however, you want to be careful to not have your ego stand in the way. If you've been an associate general counsel at a large company, you don't want to go to a smaller company as an assistant general counsel. Yet, what if that smaller company is a rapidly growing technology company and you were an associate general counsel in a large company in a declining industry? These are important factors to consider and the growth potential and confidence you have in a business and future colleagues may influence what path you pursue.

Geography

Geography can be another decisive factor. Like with other aspects of a job search, the more flexible you can be in this regard, the better. Increasingly, employers are more flexible about whether a lawyer needs to be onsite every day. If you are constrained geographically, you may want to entertain going broader in the geographic reach of your search and consider if you are willing to commute longer distances, at least on a part-time basis. If you are very limited in terms of geography due to family responsibilities or otherwise, it may be a factor that you periodically reassess if you are not having success in your job search.

Work/life

It is often difficult to assess the work/life culture of prospective employers. It is usually better to secure a job offer first before asking some of the tough questions that may unearth more candor about a prospective employer's working environment. When assessing if a workplace has a good working environment for you, it's important to know your priorities. Do you need flexible or reduced hours and do you need flexibility to work at home part of the time? Can you afford the economic impact of reducing your hours? Are you able to work full-time hours but you need predictability in your work? Do you need a job where you can be off call in order for it to be sustainable long-term? Is travel a constraint? While interest in flexible work is becoming more gender

neutral, women lawyers are still disproportionately availing themselves of reduced hours. If you are among the lawyers seeking flexible work, know, upfront, what work/life constraints are non-negotiable for you? Additionally, to broaden your options, consider whether you can wait to raise your interest in flexible work. If you work a conventional schedule and raise your interest in flexible work at your annual review after establishing yourself as a contributor and getting to know your colleagues, you may have more success in establishing a flexible schedule.

Assessing your work/life priorities will help you align your own needs and preferences with your workplace as well as the nature of the work you pursue. That said, sometimes the flexibility you may be seeking will align with what your prospective employer wants. For example, if your prospective employer has limited office space, proposing to telecommute would give you the flexibility you may want while addressing office space constraints. Perhaps your prospective employer is uncertain of their workload; if you can offer to expand and contract your hours based on the ebb and flow of work, it would also be a win-win. Aligning your work/life needs with your job will significantly impact your happiness and in turn, your performance, at work so it is not a consideration that should be minimized.

The painting inside – designing an effective job search

Once the picture of your next job comes into focus, here are some additional tips that will help sketch out the right job for you.

Gain confidence

For re-entry lawyers and lawyers in transition, confidence is often a significant impediment to a successful search. The longer these lawyers have been out of work, the more their lack of confidence and diminished self-esteem seem to get in their way. In my work with re-entry moms, it is most acute. Your confidence will grow if you adhere to the tips below as well as invest in looking the part. So buy the right clothes to fit in when you're attending networking events or going on job interviews. Print up business cards with your name, mobile number and an appropriate personal email address.

Network effectively

The vast majority of people get jobs through their networks, so accessing your network effectively will be integral to your job searching success. One challenge for employed lawyers seeking jobs is that they fear tapping into their network and having their current employer find

out. You must discreetly let people in your network know that you are looking. Those who are unemployed are often unwilling to delve deep into their network due to shame in revealing they are unemployed. You need to set that feeling aside and know that the only way to better where you are now is to push yourself through the lack of confidence that will otherwise stand in your way. Chapter seven in this book gives more advice on networking.

Get help

Seek out those in your network who have recently transitioned to a new job successfully and find out the steps they took. Tap into your undergraduate and law school career services' offices. It is in your law school's financial interest for you to be gainfully employed, not only so that you will be better positioned to donate back to the law school, but also because you will hopefully help employ their alumni.

Makes sure your resume tells a story

Your resume should convey a story about your life in a clear and concise way. Once you've completed a draft of your resume, share it with trusted contacts who are not lawyers to make sure your resume is intuitive to them. If you've had a non-linear career path, your resume should account for your time away from paid work and not have unexplained gaps. Prioritize the most relevant former job experience and include your volunteer experience to demonstrate your interests, leadership, and how you have spent your time. Where volunteer experience is transferable, include that information as well as pro bono involvement and continuing legal education credits too. Particularly if your career has been non-linear, include a three sentence objective statement at the top of your resume that summarizes your experience, the skills you've gleaned, and where you plan to apply them next.

Use your unemployed time wisely

You don't know how long you'll be unemployed but you want to make sure that you're making the best use of that time. You also want to ensure that when you receive a job offer, there will be no unnecessary transition time that would delay your start. So, be sure you are in good standing with your bar membership and your continuing legal education status. If you're a re-entry mom and you feel rusty in terms of technology or the area of law you plan to return to, take those continuing legal education classes or classes in Excel to get your skills and knowledge current. If you are seeking to transition to a new practice area, show a demonstrated

interest in that new area by taking classes and gaining experience, where possible, in that area.

Seek and maintain professional affiliations and get involved in bar associations, trade associations, and law school and college alumni groups that will help your networking. Also, offer to speak or be an organizer of a conference where speakers and attendees will be the types of people you will want to network with and interact. Do pro bono work at your local bar or through organizations where you can help out while networking and keeping your legal skills fresh. Also, consider hanging out a shingle. Often the networking you do to solicit clients is the same that you would do to seek a job and your legal work may convert into a future job. Establishing your own practice while job searching is a way to earn an income, minimize the gaps on your resume, keep your skills current, and create more structure around your job search.

Know what your prospective employer wants and needs

Most job seekers are preoccupied with themselves, often focusing solely on their wants and needs. Instead, effective job seekers get to know prospective employers' challenges and how they can help address them. To learn this in advance of an interview, research how your prospective employer and their competitors are featured in the market and also look at your prospective employer's LinkedIn profile, Facebook page, Tweets and YouTube videos.

Overcome your prospective employer's fear of placement failure

If you're a re-entry lawyer or lawyer in transition, an employer may be worried about taking a risk on you. For women re-entry lawyers, there are often competency biases too. If you're having difficulty getting back to work, it may be worth proposing to work for a limited term of up to three months without compensation. Your prospective employer can use that time to assess whether you are the right fit while you regain confidence, ensure the environment is right for you, and refresh your skills. If your prospective employer doesn't hire you, the unpaid internship will still be valuable for you to develop potential references and gain current experience to make you more attractive as an applicant elsewhere.

Identify the right culture for you

Your success at work will often be dictated by your colleagues and the work environment. Take the time to figure this out and not underestimate the importance of workplace culture to your happiness and in turn, your success. For women, part of this may be assessing the success

women have had at the organization. Are there visible women leaders? Did you interview with women who were relatable? If you have children, is the environment family-friendly? These questions are typically easier to find answers to once an offer is in hand and they are important questions to ask before accepting an offer.

Conclusion

The process of framing your career and designing an effective job search is exciting but also daunting and stressful. Coming back to the picture we sketched out together in this chapter, there is one more important image to keep in mind. Remember to be willing to color outside the lines. This may mean taking some risks that you didn't anticipate. Be open to working in a new medium that may enhance the trajectory of your success in a new way that you may not have otherwise seen.