

experience at an A-firm will impress any prospective employer. Experience at a B-Firm or a C-Firm can be more restrictive, that is if you're looking to jump up to an A-Firm.

- Academic records do matter. A mediocre academic history will need to be explained. Conversely, a spectacular academic history might make your present C-Firm occupancy of little concern.
- The more years of concentrated and specialised experience you have makes for the better bargaining position. As the years go by, many of your peers will change direction, move jurisdiction or drop out of law altogether, and you will no longer be competing with them. In this respect, specialising early on and staying with that

specialisation will pay-off as you become a rare commodity. But you need to make sure you are comfortable with that specialisation, as it can be hard to change areas of law once you are pigeon-holed.

Conclusion

If you are thinking it's time to move on, the appropriate first move is probably to ask yourself the five simple questions raised above and then to get your CV updated. Naturally, Paluch then says that you should approach a legal recruitment agent to get the ball rolling. At the very least, the recruitment agent can help you ascertain your career direction and tidy up your CV. More importantly, recruitment agents can sometimes get you an interview

that you otherwise wouldn't get if you were to send your CV to the firm directly. There are some things, however, to remember about recruitment agents:

- They often operate on a commission basis, so be wary of what recruitment agents say about the job once you've got a job offer.
- Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Different recruitment agents have different jobs on their books.
- Commercial law firms make up most of recruitment companies client base. If your desire is to move into the field of criminal law or family law, approaching firms directly might be more productive than going through a recruitment agency. ■

Discussion Forum

“How does your law firm comply or fail to comply with the Young Lawyers’ ‘Thriving and Surviving Employment Guidelines’ promoting a better work/life balance?”

“Not staying back late is like shouting, while waving arms madly, I am not driven, interested, career-minded or dedicated to my firm.

My workplace is flexible in that we don't have to actually clock stamp ourselves in each day and you can spontaneously decide to disappear if there is nothing on. Partners however tend to forget their human like status and can be annoyed if you do not magically appear every time they click their fingers whether that be at 11am or 11pm.

At my firm I do not know any junior legal staff who have extra curricular evening activities which they regularly attend. Your life is consumed by the office and anything planned ahead of time must be able to be quickly shunted to another time if work decides at 4pm that it needs you to work late.”

Anonymous, Large commercial firm

“[My firm]’s workplace policies and practices fulfill the requirements of the Guidelines.

Certainly, as articled clerks, we receive outstanding levels of training and professional development. We also have the benefit of knowing that once our articles year finishes, we are retained as first years.

I think there are misnomers in the wider market place that [my firm] is a sweat shop. Clearly,

hard work is valued but I have never experienced pressure to stay back after hours unless absolutely needed.”

Anonymous, Large commercial firm

[My firm] is in favour of ensuring that employees do not feel obliged to work past nominated working hours unless reasonably required.

Most employees work from 8.30am and generally go home around 6.00pm-6.30pm. There will be very few employees who will be in the office after 7.00pm. However, this is not to say that we never work past 7.00pm – obviously when there are deadlines to be met or extra tasks to be completed then longer hours are expected.

By heading home at 6.00pm or even 6.30pm, employees are given time to spend with their family, engage in sport or other activities (cl 3.5 of Guidelines).

[My firm] encourages employees to attend seminars and courses which are aimed at continuing legal education, with its own continuing legal education program for articled clerks and first/second year solicitors, which is run throughout the whole year...

[My firm] also allows employees to attend external seminars and courses which are useful for the employee's area of practice and

it also pays for attendance at such seminars (cl 7.5 and 7.7 of Guidelines).”

Anonymous, Medium commercial firm

“There appears to be a growing irony within bigger law firms. HR and the partners are happy to send their staff to CLE programs and professional development training. However, the partners themselves do not attend such courses.

The partners are managers often with no managerial competency. They are supposed to run a team and distribute work fairly and yet many have no interpersonal or delegation skills.

Undoubtedly most partners have brilliant minds, know the law and are great at strategising. However, it is time that they also gain competency in 'anger management', 'positive communication' and 'time management skills.’”

Anonymous, Large commercial firm

To contribute to the next discussion forum go to www.liv.asn.au/sections/younglawyers/about_wha_s.html. You can view the Thriving and Surviving Employment Guidelines at www.liv.asn.au/news/pro_issues/miscdocs/thrivesurvive.pdf