

Career Doctor

Dear Career Doctor

I am a third year lawyer at a mid-tier firm, working in the area of corporate/ commercial law. I am interested in considering a move to an in-house position.

How does such a role differ from a private practice position? Also, as a junior lawyer wanting to make the transition from private practice to an in-house role, what can I do to ensure that I will be viewed by the corporate sector as a prime candidate?

Looking for a Change

Dear Looking for a Change

It is not surprising that many lawyers in private practice, including junior lawyers like yourself, have aspirations of becoming an in-house lawyer. A survey of the legal profession conducted by Mahlab Recruitment in 2004 revealed that 23% of the private practice lawyers surveyed saw a transition to an in-house role as the next move in their career.

I agree with you that it is important to understand how an in-house role will differ from your current position before making such a move. As an in-house lawyer, it is likely that you will be working as part of a team of professionals from different disciplines. It is also likely that you will have the independence to raise important commercial issues affecting business operations and to add value across a broad range of activities. You will stand out as an invaluable member of the corporate team not only for your legal expertise, but because you are integral in helping the organisation achieve success.

In a private practice environment, you do not necessarily have the opportunity to gain a complete insight into your clients' business goals. If you are keen to tackle more commercial decisions and head down a career path towards management, then an in-house position is certainly worth considering.

In addition to this, depending on the type and size of the organisation and its legal department, as an in-house lawyer, you may be expected to give advice on a number of different areas of law that affect a corporation (for example, OH&S and employment law issues), not only pure corporate/ commercial legal issues which you are accustomed to in your current position at your firm.

Unfortunately, an in-house role is not always an easy position to obtain. Being an in-house lawyer requires sound training in commercial and corporate law and is an extremely competitive pursuit.

However, there are ways you can increase your chances of obtaining such a role.

Here are some suggestions to assist you in achieving your goal:

1. Gain experience in general commercial law

You have this covered! For a move into corporate practice, it is important to work in a practice area that will give you experience in broad commercial work. Experience in responding to legal issues and managing transactions that corporations deal with on a day-to-day basis will put you a step above the rest. Examples of the type of experience valued by corporate organisations include contractual drafting, familiarity with the law as it pertains to advertising, trade practices legislation and employment.

Another important undertaking is to gain experience that is specifically sought out by the industry of your choice. This could be through working for clients in that industry, either on secondment or in your capacity as an external lawyer. This will allow you to gain an understanding of issues relating to corporations in your field of interest and experience that will be looked upon favourably when you apply for an in-house role.

2. Put your hand up for secondment opportunities

If your firm offers secondment opportunities to its employees, put your hand up and make sure you are considered. This is the best way to make your résumé stand out amongst numerous applications and gives you the opportunity to be trained to respond to everyday commercial decisions. Through this experience, you will learn to make commercial judgment calls with more confidence and will be able to demonstrate this to a future employer.

3. Join and attend networking functions

Networking functions are invaluable in establishing contacts in your target market. For example, if you are interested in intellectual property, you could attend conferences and seminars run by The Intellectual Property Society of Australia and New Zealand Inc. This would increase your business contacts and will keep you up to date with developments both in Australia and worldwide.

On a general level, attending functions organised by a body such as the Australian Corporate Lawyers Association is also very important. Many lawyers rely on their contacts and networks as a source of market information, particularly job opportunities.

4. Keep your eye on the ball

Ensure you register with a specialist legal recruiter that has a team dedicated to in-house recruitment opportunities. Also, keep your eye on the newspapers and your favourite company websites for any positions that may be advertised directly. The wider your search, the more opportunity you have of finding your ideal role.

5. Take time to prepare your résumé

Ensure that your résumé incorporates a clear and concise outline of the work you have completed throughout your career. Try and obtain a job description for the particular role you are applying for and ensure that you have addressed as many relevant points as possible in your application.

Detail is important but make sure not to overdo it! Make sure the information you include is tailored to the role, including any transactions you have worked on that are relevant to the company. Include the names of clients who are from the same industry group as the corporation you wish to work for, as this is a good point of reference and establishes your portfolio of work.

6. Maintain your industry knowledge

It is very important to demonstrate your general knowledge of what is happening in the corporate world.



By **Nalini Moore,**
Mahlab
Recruitment

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Book Review

Greg Craven, "Conversations with the Constitution: Not Just a Piece of Paper."



By **Mark Farquhar**,
Solicitor,
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To many of us, the word 'Constitution' conjures up images of lengthy undergraduate lectures focused on the intricate operation of s.51(xxxix) and the way in which it impacts on the powers of the legislature. In other words, the Constitution does not evoke fond memories or a sense of passion and excitement, rather it causes us to reminisce on lecturers more interested in the Commonwealth's powers over lightships, beacons and buoys than the dwindling interest of their students.

Not so of 'Conversations with the Constitution'. Professor Greg Craven's latest publication, rather than considering the purely legal provisions of our Constitution, looks at the history of federalism in Australia from the perspective of its founding document, as well as the way in which the document will embrace the future. This fresh approach to the Constitution, its operation and its history helps to invigorate the document and, hopefully, to alleviate the unpopularity of our founding document.

Professor Craven's discussion commences with the founding of the Constitution. In doing so, the reader is drawn into the world of the late Nineteenth Century and the development of the document in its original form, along with the characters who developed the original concept. From this premise, the book proceeds to lead

the reader through the various phases of the Constitution's development and, in doing so, the development of our nation itself.

As well as providing an interesting discussion of Australian history from a (vaguely) legal context, the book examines a number of more recent developments. These include the expansionist approach to implied rights under the Constitution and the way in which the document would adapt to even greater changes, such as the move towards an Australian republic. The lack of a pure legal discussion also helps to increase the book's appeal to a wider, non-academic, audience.

Professor Craven's writing, whilst clearly imparting his own personal opinion, does provide a balanced discussion of both sides of the various arguments. However, this does not diminish the passion and zeal with which a number of his arguments are presented, forcing the reader to consider the author's contention and depart from any neutrality on the subject.

'Conversations with the Constitution' is an excellent book in a legal, historical and contemporary sense. However, given the way in which much of the populace regards our founding document, perhaps the author would have achieved even greater praise had the book not included the word "Constitution" in its title. ■

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Reading business publications such as the Business Review Weekly and the Australian Financial Review will assist in keeping you up to date. Never underestimate the power of being able to refer to relevant issues in discussions with a potential employer. It is also a good idea to read overseas publications such as Fast Company or Fortune to keep abreast of trends in other markets.

7. Consider additional study

A Masters degree adds a strong element to any résumé, particularly if it is backed up by work experience. Double degrees such as combining an LLM with an MBA highlight your knowledge in the general commercial arena as well as in legal analysis. There are other specialist courses available for particular areas of law, such as a Graduate Diploma in Company Secretarial Practice. It is important to know what direction you are headed in before you make a commitment to further study - that way you can be sure to study the right course for your career path.

The most important step in securing your first in-house role is actually applying for roles of interest when they come up. If you are not successful on your first try, seek feedback either from your recruitment consultant or the organisation itself (if it is a direct application) and learn from the experience. Persevere and apply for the next opportunity.

I wish you all the best in securing a corporate role! ■
Career Doctor

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(registration from 5.15pm)

Where: Law Institute of Victoria,
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Cost: \$25.00 payable by cash on the night -
Register by Friday 19 August online
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