

Searching for Job in a Down Economy

Searching for a job in any economy is a full-time job in and of itself. This is especially true in a difficult economy. In the last year, the legal market has tightened considerably in response to the shrinking economy. As a result, graduates and students all over the country are now having a difficult time finding employment. Nevertheless, employers are still hiring and people do find jobs in a down economy.

There is simply no magic bullet for survival in troubled times and the old advice remains the best:

1. **Adjust your expectations**

Your first job is not your last job. In fact, even in a robust economy, most new attorneys stay in their first job, on average, one to three years. Think of your next job as a stepping stone to the job you really want, and realize that your job search may take longer than you expected.

2. **Distinguish Yourself**

Take a look at your application materials. Are you using the same phrasing that everyone else is? In a bad job market, employers are flooded with applications and, on paper, everyone can tend to look the same. Think about what makes you different and use that to your advantage. If you are having trouble identifying what distinguishes you from other candidates see # 4.

3. **Be Optimistic and Persistent**

Maintaining a positive attitude while unemployed is a difficult task to say the least. It's easy to feel like throwing in the towel when you have been applying for jobs for months on end with little or no real leads. But sitting around and bemoaning your fate will not get you a job, and will wreak havoc on your self esteem. A job search is about marketing yourself and your best qualities. If you constantly focus on the negative and see yourself as a victim, so will everyone else, including potential employers.

4. **Get Creative**

- a. Consider volunteering for pro bono work with a public interest organization. Volunteering is a great way to build your legal experience while you seek a paying job. It can also help build your network and may connect you to potential employers. It also shows that you are enthusiastic about the law and that your skills have not grown stale. Check out bar associations websites which often provide resources for attorneys seeking pro bono work.
- b. Take a continuing legal education course. This is a great way to stay current in the legal field and highlight an area of interest on your resume. You might even meet your future employer since most people who take CLE's are practicing attorneys. CLE's are also a good way to show potential employers that you stayed engaged in the field and learned something that may be a benefit to them while you were searching for a job. Contact bar associations and CLE course administrators about scholarships to attend CLE programs, as you may be able to attend programs at a reduced rate or at no cost while you are searching for a job.

- c. Write something that is vocationally useful. Get it published in a legal periodical and/or send it to practitioners who can use the information. This a good way to get your name out in the legal community, highlight an area of interest on your resume, and show potential employers your commitment to and enthusiasm for the practice of law.
- d. Learn About the Legal Profession. Leveraging your knowledge of the business of law to encourage someone to make an investment in you will help set you apart.

5. **Diversify Your Job search**

DO NOT rely exclusively on the internet job posting sites to deliver your next job. The vast majority of opportunities are never advertised and you will miss out if your job search consists solely of marathon sessions on Symplicity, Craigslist and other job posting sites. Effective job seekers take a proactive approach to their job search by building contacts and identifying unadvertised opportunities, in addition to responding to advertised positions.

6. **Get out of the House -- NETWORK**

Most job seekers dread networking. But the fact remains that most jobs are not found by sitting in front of the computer. Meeting people and sharing information is a very important part of any job search. Tell EVERYONE you know you are looking for a job. Do not discount someone's ability to help you in your job search just because they are not a lawyer or not obviously connected with the legal community. You will be amazed at all the people who are known by the people you know. Also, reconnect with law school classmates, professors (including adjuncts) and former employers. Join bar associations and attend related events. In short, get out there and market yourself, and promise yourself that you will step outside of your comfort zone at least once a week.

7. **Consider Temporary Strategies**

While many employers are not in the position to offer full-time employment, they might be able to offer you temporary or per diem work. Though this is not a permanent solution, it will get you experience, a paycheck and expand your professional network. It may even lead to permanent employment. Start by contacting former employers and other attorneys with whom you developed a relationship during law school. Also contact very small law firms and offer your services as a per diem attorney. Note that many small law firms are thriving in this economy. Put on a suit and personally deliver your resume. A face-to-face meeting will leave a more positive lasting impression and is more likely to produce results, even if it seems initially less efficient.

8. **Stay Current & Connected**

Attend continuing legal education classes and read legal periodicals such as the NJ Law Journal and the Philadelphia Legal Intelligencer to stay current on the latest developments in your field and the latest trends in the legal marketplace. Keeping informed will help you focus your job search, network effectively, and give you something to talk about in interviews. Connect with practice areas/settings that are viable in this economy (e.g., bankruptcy, litigation, employment/labor, immigration, environmental, anti-trust, IP, tax, family, criminal.)

9. Set a Schedule and Stick To it

Successful job seekers approach their job search as a full-time job (or a part-time job for those who have part-time employment) and set measurable and realistic daily and weekly goals. Get up at the same time every day and make an action plan for the day. For example, you may devote the morning to researching employers and the afternoon to contacting those employers. Accomplishing small goals each day will do wonders for your self esteem and help keep you focused and motivated.

10. Connect with the Career Planning Office

A job search in a troubling economy can be a long and emotionally exhausting process. The Career Planning office is here to support you in your efforts through individual job search counseling, resume and cover letter advice, interview preparation and mock interview sessions and online services. In addition, we sponsor programs which feature alumni and other attorneys who are willing to talk to students and alumni, which can help you expand your professional network. Finally, if you are moving away from the Philadelphia area and would like access to another law school's career services office, we can send a reciprocity request to another law school on your behalf. If you would like to take advantage of this service, send an email to Doreen Clayton-Schomber at dclayton@camden.rutgers.edu. Make sure you include your full name, year of graduation and the name of the school whose services you would like to access.

11. Sharpen Your Tools

If you have been using a resume/cover letter that is not working for you -- meaning you are getting few or no bites -- it is time to assess the problem and fix it. Contact the Career Planning Office and ask for a resume/cover letter review. Along the same lines, if you are getting interviews, but no offers, make an appointment with Career Planning to assess your interview skills and/or to do a mock interview.

12. Line up References

A reference can make or break your chances, so choose your references wisely. If you were laid off from your job due to the economy, ask for a letter of recommendation from your former employer with a full explanation.

13. Find ways to make some extra money

If you are totally stressed out about paying your bills, you won't be in the best frame of mind to conduct a proactive job search. One way to make some extra cash without working fulltime is tutoring (for high school courses, college application essays, SATs, LSATs, etc.). You can apply to tutor students through Kaplan or Princeton Review or advertise your services on Craigslist.

14. Pay it forward

The legal market can be unfriendly and overly competitive. Help overcome this potentially negative environment by assisting your peers with job leads and networking contacts, and providing moral support. Paying it forward makes you feel good and it's bound to eventually come back to you.

Advice for 3Ls with delayed starting dates

1. Inquire About Alternative Arrangements

If they don't offer it, inquire with the firm about part-time work, work in another office, a stipend for a pro bono assignment, a reduced salary for a client secondment or help securing a clerkship.

2. Keep the lines of communication open

During the delay, stay in touch with your firm, and don't fall victim to your fears in the absence of hard information. Arrange to have lunch with the people with whom you will eventually work. Find out if there are seminars, meetings or other marketing events you can attend. The firm will be impressed by your savvy and commitment to being a member of their firm.

3. Keep yourself busy during the delay

Volunteer for a public interest agency, write something for a legal periodical or a scholarly publication, join bar associations and attend their meetings and other functions, and attend continuing legal education classes in the practice area that you were hired to work in or, if necessary, more viable practice areas in the recession. Also consider applying for judicial clerkships or for per diem legal work.