



MSLAW Academic Support

Factors to Consider When Deciding on a Career Path

Excerpted from *Your First Year as a Lawyer* by Ursula Furi-Perry (Jist Publishing, 2010).

Career materials and books for lawyers often urge readers to focus on and try to find “the right fit.” But just what does “the right fit” mean, and what goes into finding it on the job? The following are some factors to help you get started, along with some questions to ponder when contemplating each factor.



- Your interests. For example:
 - Do you want to perfect your skills in one specialty or practice area, or would you rather work in various practice areas and avoid being pigeon-holed?
 - Do you want to feel that you are helping your community or the greater good in your work?
 - Do you enjoy working with many clients, or would you rather enjoy building relationships with fewer clients whom you serve more closely?
 - Do you want to practice law; to practice law in non-traditional ways; or to leave the practice of law?
 - Do you want to be given substantive and meaningful work assignments?

- Your on-the-job needs and preferences. Maybe you want to work with a diverse group of people; maybe you want in-depth training and plenty of opportunities for professional development; maybe you’re seeking a close-knit work environment. For example, ask the following questions:
 - Do you want to work in an environment that makes you feel comfortable every day, or would you rather work in an environment that frequently gets you out of your comfort zone?
 - Do you want to work for an employer whose values match yours closely, or at a place where many different viewpoints and values are represented?

- Do you want to work with people who are a lot like you, or with a diverse group at an employer that values cultural sensitivity and diversity in the workplace?
- Do you want plenty of opportunities for professional development and continuing education?
- Do you want clear opportunities for advancement, along with requirements for advancement that are clearly spelled out?
- Do you want to work for an employer that provides networking opportunities or many opportunities for socializing with colleagues outside of work?
- Your future goals. For example:
 - Do you want a position that you hope to hold just for the next few years, or a long-term position?
 - Do you want to build a skill set that will readily translate into a variety of career options in the future?
 - Do you want to work for an employer that's amenable to organizational change and growth?
 - Do you want to participate in important decisions that happen in the workplace?
- Your own skills and aptitudes; the potential employer's preferences; and the likelihood of you being hired for the position. You may have your heart set on a prestigious (and hard-to-come-by) big firm position with a high-paying salary, but if your grades and other qualifications don't measure up, you likely won't be offered that job. When applying for a position, take an honest look at what the position requires and what the employer is seeking in candidates. For example, ask:
 - Does your skill set match the skill set the employer requires?
 - What are some skills that you need to develop before taking on the position that you're considering?
 - What are some of your marketable skills that you can highlight to the employer?
- Practical considerations. From the employer's location to salary to work schedules, you also need to weigh practical factors that may influence your decision on a particular employer. For example:
 - Do you want a high salary or simply want to receive compensation that is fair in relation to that of your peers?
 - Do you want a workplace that embraces merit-based compensation and promotions?
 - Do you want to attain reasonable work-life balance; want a flexible or alternative schedule; or want to work part-time?
 - Do you want manageable billable hour quotas and deadlines?
 - Do you want a manageable commute?
 - Do you want satisfactory fringe benefits; in addition, do you want job perks—from the company Blackberry to paid lunches?