

Career Reality Check

By Mary Waldron

We've all been there. You land the perfect job. It's exactly what you've been waiting for. But...there are a few drawbacks. The commute is horrible. The pay isn't that great. And your coworkers are rather cold. Many times, when job seekers have their hearts set on certain dream jobs, they forget to acknowledge a few "minor" inescapable details that could be detrimental to their work. Take the time to give yourself a reality check before accepting a job. Or just read on, and we'll do it for you.

1. Location

The bottom line is that you should know yourself and choose your work location accordingly. If you live in Orange County, CA, and you want to take a job in Santa Monica, CA, you might want to think twice about the commute. For those of you who are not aware, that's about a three-hour drive in the morning and, if you're lucky, an hour-and-a-half drive at night. Now, consider adding that to a job that requires you to work 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Yeah, it's not healthy.

Many people convince themselves that they want these types of jobs so badly that they'll put up with the drive, but don't kid yourself. You'll regret it, fall into a pit of despair, and end up teary-eyed in your boss's office. Trust me, I know—I've been there.

So when you search for jobs, stay within an hour radius of your home. Don't say "I'm open to relocating" unless you have a deposit check in your hand.

2. Hours

This one is huge for lawyers. Face it; you will be working an insane number of hours, especially at the beginning of your career. Those with law degrees have a variety of options, and if you're not happy with a rigorous law firm schedule that usually requires more than 10 hours per day, you may want to look into alternatives.

Some jobs may even require you to come in before 9:00 a.m., and if you are not a morning person, you need to become one quickly or find something that suits you better. Otherwise, you'll just end up getting fired for not showing up on time or putting in enough hours.

3. Pay

This one is tough, especially for young attorneys. If you're not one of the lucky ones to find a six-figure salary right out of law school, you will have to invest some time before the money will come. You will also have to stay

realistic about what you can afford to live on. If you're an associate starting at a New York City law firm with a \$42,000-per-year salary, you'd better think about where you're going to live because money will be *tight*. If you don't feel like sleeping on a colleague's couch for a year and eating Cup Noodles for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, then you should reconsider.

In almost any industry, many in-demand jobs start out very poorly paid and take time to gain momentum. I'm not saying you should turn down your first job offer after law school because it doesn't pay big bucks; I'm just warning you that it won't be fun. Some people will not last under these conditions, and as a result, they'll eventually quit. As I said before, know yourself and what you can live with!

4. Work Environment

This one is almost impossible to decipher until you visit the office itself. Everything from the people to the dress code to the vibe of the office—it's all got to be considered. You can usually figure out these details within a few minutes of entering the firm's office.

Again, if you're someone who will be miserable in a quiet and conservative office, don't shut yourself into that type of place. You'll resent your job and coworkers, which will just make coming to work even less enjoyable.