

Identify a Career Focus in Your Legal Job Search

By Emily Sanderson

Unless you are an entrepreneur with funding and other resources available to you (including risk management) to start your own practice, you should find a niche or two among your interests, talents, and skill sets that you can offer to the legal profession. And the big secret in the entrepreneurial world is that as a business owner, you are still seeking to find a niche in the global marketplace but just with higher stakes — such as the livelihood of your staff and clientele, in addition to yourself and your family.

Attorneys who identify one or two practice areas at the tops of their resumes and in the first paragraphs of their cover letters will do better in their job searches than those who don't. You've got the schooling and the experience, but by identifying your niche within the legal profession, you are showing potential employers that you have initiative and direction. You are willing to play a role, to offer certain skill sets, to a collaborative and competitive office team.

So how do you determine which niche will work for you? Which way is the wind blowing? Weathervanes — or trade magazines, trade websites, and information from your law school — will help you identify what is hot in

the legal marketplace right now. What is hot depends on what people are willing to spend money on. The million-dollar question is "Can you provide products or services that are unique or superior to your competition, or can you provide skill sets to a potential employer that will assist in doing this?"

It's okay to send out a few different resumes with different practice areas identified while you are in the process of building your career. Oftentimes, you can present former experience in a way that will complement your present endeavors by identifying transferable skills — skills that are useful as well as marketable in multiple settings. For example, most legal secretaries know how to operate a copy machine, but a fast typing speed and experience in formatting legal documents will separate them from the competition and will apply to both positions with firms focusing on IP as well as positions with firms focusing on healthcare.

Right now, a practice supporting the healthcare or accounting industries will provide ample job opportunities and job stability, which is often sacrificed when one pursues a passionate career path. The challenge is finding a happy medium between what you are passionate about and what is marketable. As the United States continues to depend more and more on the Far East to provide its manufacturing and other labor needs, this country will require more and more educated people to manage and to lead. Within these capacities

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individuals will have opportunities to use their creativity and to draw upon multiple skill sets, and the legal field will continue to cater more and more to higher-end industries.

Once you have started your legal career within a certain niche, you can begin to branch out and pursue other related interests. Keep your job search geared to what you have to offer a potential employer rather than what a potential employer can offer you; this will assist you in gaining perspective as a team player in the global marketplace.