

The Job Market for Attorneys Looking to Move In-House as a General Counsel

By: Dawn Lowe

Let's take a step back in time. For some of you, it might be a very large step. You're in your 3rd grade classroom, in your little desk made of grey metal with a faux wood desktop with a pencil holder at the top, book cubby in the bottom. You may be sitting in the front row or behind a piggy-tailed little girl or, perhaps, a stripe-shirted little boy. Your teacher asks who wants to read their story to the class. You are eager to share your story and your hand shoots up. You look around the room and see your friends with their hands in the air. You lean to your side and press your hand as high as it will go and before you can stop yourself, you're grunting with a "pick-me" grunt. You're waiting for what seems like an eternity, and then you watch in slow motion as your teacher picks...

This schoolroom situation describes the job market for many attorneys looking to move in-house as a general counsel. As a matter of fact, in-house general counsel jobs make up approximately 10% of the current legal job market and receive roughly 20% of all applicants. It would be great if these percentages would align, but it doesn't look like trends will be in that favor. So, what's an attorney looking to move in-house supposed to do?

First, get yourself an excellent attorney recruiter who understands the current job market, future job trends, and comes highly recommended. Call other attorneys and read your legal magazines to locate a good recruiter. If you can find a friend or a friend of a friend who's had an excellent experience with a recruiter, dig in and find out the details.

Second, get your story sparkly, that is to say get your general counsel resume ready. Before you dust off the old resume, it's important to have two basic understandings: 1. Your resume will be scrutinized closer than you expect. 2. Your claims will be checked more thoroughly than you expect. All this equals: TELL THE TRUTH! Some of you may be thinking that if you don't "spice-up" your resume, then you'll look boring and unmentionable and that the teacher will never pick you. According to trends in the general counsel market, having a varied and non-specific resume may increase your chances. In the case of the small corporation, they may need you to be a peddler of many tasks and the master of none.

Another way to get picked by the teacher to read your story, er... um, selected as in-house general counsel is to be very specific when you describe your experience. Don't just mention that you handled data with your previous firm. Go deep. Mention that you handled cloud-based data preservation and violation. Don't mention that you handled financial transactions. Tell them whether you handled proxies, filings, or securities. Your resume IS the place where your story should come to life, and no story comes to life without excellent details. Forget the out-dated notion that your resume needs to be one page. It doesn't need to be five pages either. Use your words wisely. The last word on resumes is this: one resume does not fit all. Taylor your resume to the job you are seeking.

Finally, your cover letter should be minimal. Something like this: Hey, I'm qualified, pay close attention to this experience, Boom! Let your resume do your story telling. Just think of this as one big exercise in getting the teacher to let you read your story in front of the class. Maybe, just maybe, that cute 3rd grader you've had your eye on will notice you now.