

THE JOB SEARCH AFTER BEING FIRED

Being fired from any job can be a shocking and painful experience. These feelings are often exacerbated for attorneys who may not have had any clue that a termination was going to happen. Lawyers who are fired often are completely caught off guard because their termination may be the result of a single mistake or the opinion of a single partner while others raved about their work. Nevertheless, the person must refocus and find a new job to advance his or her career. If you are someone who has been discharged from your legal employment here are some things to consider:

I. **Be Optimistic:**

Although being discharged from your job may leave you bitter it is important that you maintain optimism for your new job search. When looking for a new position here are a few important things to keep in mind:

1. **You are employable:** As an attorney you have a broad range of skills marketable in a number of industries. Lawyers' abilities to negotiate, manage, interpret and write are useful in numerous employment situations. Thus, any lawyer in the market should be optimistic about his or her skills and ability to find a job.
2. **Networking Works:** Many lawyers find their networks to be most useful after a discharge. First, many attorneys understand or have experienced stressful work situations and will not assume that because you were fired you are incompetent. Be optimistic about your network and contact your friends for emotional and professional support.

II. **Be Positive:**

After a bad work experience many people will reflect that negative energy during their new job search. It is important not to do so. You want to be positive, market yourself in a positive light and maintain professionalism. Consider the following:

1. **Do not bad mouth your former employer:** Be sure to avoid making negative comments about your former employer. Remember the legal community is relatively small and the person you interview with could be friends with a partner at your old firm. Also, it highlights negative skills and the inability to resolve conflict.
2. **Do not settle:** Do not take any position or an unfavorable offer because of your experience. This will make you look desperate and could negatively affect your career path.
3. **Be flexible:** With a tough job market and multiple skills, do not assume that you can only be a lawyer or practice in only one legal area. Be flexible in your job search and consider multiple practice areas or other industries.

III. **Be Smart – Negotiate A Severance**

When losing your job it is time to use your lawyering skills to protect yourself and your future. You will want to negotiate a severance package. Here are some things to keep in mind:

1. **Be proactive in a negative situation:** If you think you are about to be laid off, don't wait for the notice. Address the issue head on and try to negotiate severance early. This is especially important in a mass lay-off because you don't want to settle for a general severance package that does not value you as an individual. Signs that you may be released include: boss stops speaking to you, you stop being invited to things, and new projects stop coming your way.
2. **Try to get a good reference:** Although you may be released you may still be able to get good references from you former employee or a particular partner. You should try to negotiate for this. It is important to maintain your professionalism, stay positive and not burn bridges just because the situation is stressful.
3. **Do not rush to sue:** If you think you have a legal claim, carefully weigh the benefits and detriments of suing. Again, the legal community is small and word could travel about your case and negatively affect your job search. A better approach is to speak to the employer and see if a claim can be avoided through negotiations.
4. **Get a complete package:** Like negotiating an offer, you want to make sure you get a complete severance package as well. Be sure to ask
 - a. How long will my salary continue and at what rate.
 - b. How long will my health insurance continue.
 - c. What will you tell employers that contact you about me.