



Written by Antoine Zheng

WHAT ARE THE CAREER OPTIONS FOR EXPERIENCED LAWYERS?

When lawyers start out, their career progression is often taken as read. The coveted positions are in busy and diverse practices that offer breadth of experience and exposure, all with the ultimate aim of being made Partner. The competition is rife, and juniors notoriously work hard to find their niche and stay ahead of their peers, working on more complicated trading projects to lay the best possible foundations to achieve Partner status.

The reality is not everyone can make partner, and for many, as they approach the intermediate stage of their career, we see a shift in career aspirations. Whether it is a change in priorities away from 24/7 work towards family or leisure time or the need to find an area of law that better suits their skills and attributes, lawyers often find themselves at a cross roads.

Making Partner in a Private Practice Law Firm

The path to becoming partner is long and carefully mapped out by firms to ensure lawyers that are in the running have the skills, personality and income generation capabilities needed.

It goes without saying that a high performing senior lawyer will need to possess excellent written and verbal communication skills, not just to fulfil the technical aspects of their role, but to also effectively work with their teams, fellow partners and a wide range of new and existing clients.

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Clients will highly value exceptional legal skills, but forging long term relationships is a key aspect of a partner's role to acquire new business and keep existing accounts, not losing revenue to a competing law firm.



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Many lawyers will feel that being made partner is an inevitability assuming they have the tenure and have put in the groundwork. But increasingly, the ideal candidate is one that can demonstrate that they have the firm's wider business goals at the core of their work mentality. When looking to make partner, many candidates impress upon us their ability to "get things done" and "deliver the best legal services" available but actually, the firm is looking for someone that considers revenue generation and growing the client base as a priority for themselves, and not the something left to business development or sales teams. Legal expertise is a prerequisite, but our advice to lawyers is to understand that partners drive the business forward.

Moving In-House

There are many advantages in leaving private practice and making a move to an in-house role, but it has to be at the right time. Making the move at a junior level is often not an option as in law firms, junior lawyer's is often too broad and they have not yet created a solid foundation of legal knowledge. This is especially true in foreign firms where junior lawyers are could still be undertaking translation work. Conversely, senior lawyers are

paid more in private practice so there is little incentive to make the move. Multinationals will pay for those with company secretarial experience, but there is little motivation to bring someone across on a high salary if they cannot demonstrate their ability to lead a legal team, communicate with government departments or even conduct public relations.

The intermediate grade lawyer (4-6 years PQE) is ideally placed to join an in-house team, and for this clutch of lawyers the opportunities and rewards are attractive. Having had excellent legal training, the mid level lawyer is ready to embrace new challenges and segway into a company legal role where they have the time to then add an understanding of the business and how the legal team plays a role in the wider commercial ecosystem.

Whatever path a lawyer takes should be based on being fully aware of their own personal strengths, career aspirations and wider considerations such as family and work/life balance. It is certainly true that there decisions to make when lawyers reach a cross roads midway through their career, and a recruitment partner can help identify the best options available.

Suitable candidates should meet the following criteria:

- *Excellent legal skills*
- *Have a clear understanding of a company's business strategies*
- *Able to quickly understand a company's legal work and identify any problems*
- *Put into practice improvements to processes and procedures*
- *Lead a team and work well with senior stakeholders.*

About the Author

Antoine is a Senior Consultant based in Shanghai. He is responsible for the recruitment of banking (front office), commerce, legal and compliance professionals in China.

Antoine is part of a regional executive search team providing recruitment services for clients looking for talent at mid-to-senior levels. He has experience working with global and national financial institutions and start-up companies. Antoine has developed networks in both Beijing and Shanghai, maintaining long term relationships with clients and candidates alike.

Prior to joining Aquis Search, he was an Senior Consultant in a UK based search firm where he worked with a range of regional and global financial institutions with a focus on recruiting professionals into private banks and wealth managers

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