



How to Find An Alternate Career With A Law Degree

What exactly do you mean by alternate legal career? Are you looking for a law firm, but one that isn't organized in a traditional manner? Are you considering working as a lawyer, but not at a firm? Most people who refer to alternative law careers seem to be considering leaving the practice of law.

I dislike the phrase alternative legal career; it is often used, but has a negative connotation that is a relic of a bygone age. Twenty or more years ago, it may have made sense to think of those that left the practice of law as pursuing alternative careers. But since then, thousands of attorneys have left the profession. And one of the lessons that we have learned from that experience is that lawyers can and have done pretty much anything--from anthropologists to zoologists, from engineers to farmers.

Thus, it may helpful to rephrase your question in two respects. First, the issue is not where your law degree is likely to be viewed favorably. After all, as an applicant, it is your responsibility to make the case for yourself and demonstrate that your background and interests will be an asset to the employer. Second, the underlying questions that most often confront those who want to make more significant career changes are:

1. What do you want to do?
2. What transferable skills do you have?

Stated differently, you need to make a case to a potential employer and answer the following questions:

1. Why are you interested in the employer (as opposed to other employers)?
2. What you can do for them?

In my experience, many attorneys who seek to leave the profession (or to make significant changes where and how they practice law) find it helpful to answer the last of these questions first. Once you identify what you can do for the employer--your transferable skills--you will be able to identify potential employers and environments where those skills can make a contribution.

So how does one identify transferable skills? Here is one way that lawyers have found helpful. First, recognize that the transferable skills that matters are those you enjoy. No sense finding a new job that requires you do to all the things you already know you don't like to do. So review your jobs (paid and unpaid) and list the projects, cases, assignments, or duties that you enjoyed most. For each entry, identify the physical,



mental, or social skills involved. Next, identify six or seven non-work related activities you have enjoyed, and identify the relevant associated skills. After you have compiled all of the transferable skills you have identified, rank them, and list the six or so you like the most.

With this list in hand, you will be in a good position to start thinking about where you would enjoy putting these skills to use.