

## The Questions You Need To Ask Before Making A Lateral Move

*Law360, New York (January 6, 2016, 4:14 PM ET)* -- You may be looking to move firms as the new year has prompted a fresh look at your career. Are you moving up? Are you providing the best service to your clients? Could you make more money somewhere else? So, Law360 reached out to attorneys and asked what questions you need to ask before deciding to make a move.

### Adam Bass, Buchalter Nemer PLC



“I believe the best questions lawyers can ask relate to two areas: the focus of firm leadership and culture. What is the vision for the firm in the near- to midterm? How does the firm see itself now and in the future? Does my book of business fit with firm priorities? Second, what type of culture exists at the firm? How does it cultivate that and do my personal values align well? I advise to meet with as many lawyers within the firm as possible to get an idea of the culture firsthand from those you will be working with.”

### W. Scott Creasman, Taylor English Duma LLP

“As a new-model firm with a unique approach to recruiting — approximately 95 percent of our hiring involves laterals and does not involve headhunters — we value questions that point to character and cultural compatibility. While many law firms dance around compensation, particularly as to origination credit, we like to hear a prospective lateral ask, 'How do you reward and encourage cross-selling — in real dollars how is compensation impacted?' This signifies a commitment to a culture of sharing, mutual growth and inclusion. A lateral with like-minded appreciation for credit allocation is likely to play well in our sandbox.”

### Ryan Fournier, Armstrong Teasdale LLP

“When I was recently interviewing, I asked questions related to professional development and opportunities to get involved. My questions focused on the type of work I would be handling, the amount of client interaction, the firm’s growth forecast and long-term strategy goals, and available resources to help expand my practice in international law. I also asked about the firm’s diversity efforts

and opportunities to join and take a leadership role on various committees. When I met my practice group leader and the other attorneys at Armstrong Teasdale, I knew this was the firm for me.”

**Howard Kailes, McCarter & English LLP**

“Lateral candidates should examine some specific and general attributes of the target firm, starting with its long-term strategic vision and whether it strengthens the competitiveness of the lateral’s practice. Candidates should measure not only proposed compensation, but also whether ongoing modification would derive from an effective, equitable plan. In addition, resources such as business development support and associate and paralegal assistance merit scrutiny. Also worth ascertaining are the firm’s policies regarding success rate of integrating newcomers. Of supreme interest to laterals should be how the firm conducts itself — the old-fashioned way or with the energy and innovation required to succeed in the 21st century.”

**Paul Langer, Quarles & Brady LLP**

"Of critical importance when contemplating a lateral move is ascertaining from the prospective new employer what is expected of the lateral in terms of billable hours and originations. Miscommunication on this issue can result in a transition in which all parties are disappointed. Conversely, the lateral must determine whether the potential new employer possesses the requisite infrastructure and support mechanisms to allow the lateral to meet expectations. Lastly, the lateral should have a grasp of the prospective new employer's business plan going forward over the next several years and whether this fits in with the goals and aspirations of the lateral."

**David Lee, Michelman & Robinson LLP**

"How does my specialized practice area specifically factor into the firm’s existing strategic plan? It is critical to probe the motivation behind why this particular firm is interested in me. With many firms simply chasing a portable book, there is value in understanding whether the firm, from a strategic growth perspective, has methodically and deliberately determined that my skill set (not my book) fill a need. A firm engaged in targeted hiring based on a thoughtful growth plan is far likelier to provide onboarding laterals with the tools necessary to support and grow their practice.”

**Stella Lellos, Rivkin Radler LLP**

"It may seem obvious, but the culture of a prospective firm and whether that culture fits with the personality and goals of the prospective lateral are essential to achievement of professional growth. Qualities such as support of the attorneys to achieve their goals, dedication, selflessness, simple courtesy and appreciation of the lawyers and staff create an environment in which lawyers are able to achieve personal and professional satisfaction."

**Shelly Leonida, Levenfeld Pearlstein LLC**

“The information laterals should request of prospective employers is critical, but often so daunting that we've created online resources to guide them through the process. That said, probing questions that expose a firm’s culture are too often overlooked. The most important of these is: Does this firm have a

motivating purpose beyond the production of income for individual lawyers? If it doesn't, the firm does not have a culture at all. It's just a series of offices, which exist to house individual lawyers while they bill time. Additional questions that speak to a firm's culture include the degree to which practices are siloed, whether the firm carries any debt, and importantly, the experience of recent laterals."

**Sam Sammataro, Turner Padgett Graham & Laney PA**

"With expansion as part of our strategic plan, we look for prospective laterals who are equally committed to growth — both personally for their practices but who will also rally behind firmwide growth. When a candidate asks, 'What's the potential for my advancement in the firm, and how would my addition underscore your goals?' it opens up a dialogue about our culture that allows us to gauge if the fit is mutually beneficial. Change isn't always easy, so laterals who thrive under the notion that we will be evolving as a means to support our clients are the ones who will be successful."

--Editing by Mark Lebetkin.

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