



## Adam Avitable, Attorney Career Counselor, Legal Authority

[John J. Barnes]

Adam Avitable, who counsels job-seeking law students and attorneys on a daily basis in his capacity as a career counselor at Legal Authority, explains why he believes that many attorneys looking to change positions doom themselves to failure by approaching their job search with a narrow mind.

**Adam Avitable, a Career Counseling Manager at Legal Authority, a firm that devotes itself to marketing job-seeking attorneys to various kinds of legal employers,** has been counseling both law students and established attorneys for several years now and, in the process, has reached some interesting and provocative conclusions about how attorneys, both individually and as a group, tend to approach the task of searching for a job.

"Most attorneys go about their job search all wrong," says Avitable, who holds a Juris Doctor from Washington University Law School in St. Louis. "They peruse local and national legal newspapers and magazines and if they see a job that interests them, only then do they apply."

When asked to critique such an approach, Avitable smiles. "Well, for starters," he says, "The 'Let's see what's out there' approach is rather disorganized and haphazard in my opinion. Furthermore, it's passive rather than pro-active. I've also noticed that when attorneys look for jobs, whether they realize it or not, their tendency is to seek what seems familiar or close to what they've already been doing. When they focus so narrowly, they pre-judge their adaptive abilities...the thinking process in bankruptcy law, for instance, is not that much different from real estate...and they miss out on the opportunity to branch out and try different things. More than anything else, I think, this frustrates me the most when talking with attorneys and law students. Take some chances, I tell them. True, you don't want to stray too far from your experience base, but

some latitude is perfectly acceptable."  
**What about law students? Avitable was asked. What advice do you have for them?**

"A reporter for the New York Times asked me this several weeks ago for an article he was doing," Avitable said, "and I'll tell you substantially what I told them. Unlike established attorneys who try to focus too narrowly when looking for their next job, law students tend not to focus at all and are often wildly unrealistic about their abilities and their opportunities. I'll get calls from law students in the bottom half of their class at a Tier III law school wanting to join a large firm. I have to tell them they don't have a chance."

We asked Avitable how he handled delivering such a difficult and ultimately depressing message. "Well, I tend to let statistics do the talking," he said. "I tell them that if they graduate Law Review from Yale or the University of Chicago and have finished a federal clerkship, preferably at the appellate level, they probably will have an excellent chance to join one of the great international law firms at a salary of well over a hundred thousand dollars a year. I point out that such law firms may make exceptions but that the general rule is that such firms only hire from the top 10 to 15 law schools as listed in the annual U.S. News & World Report survey, and generally from at least the top third or, at most, from the top half of the class at such schools, and the better the school, the better the chance of being hired."

So how do you give your clients such news

and not have the typical student who assuredly is not from, say, Yale or Chicago, just give up? we asked.

"That's easy," Avitable said. "I tell my clients not to worry about such statistics, that almost nobody out there competing for jobs comes with top grades from a top school, that to the contrary, most attorneys, by definition, have average grades at average or less than average schools. In addition, I always emphasize that there are plenty of great jobs available for average attorneys or average students with average grades, that almost any attorney who has passed the bar in his or her state can get a job somewhere as a lawyer if that's what they want. I just read an article in the Los Angeles Times about an attorney who flunked the California Bar Exam 25 times before finally passing, and he's been happily employed as an attorney, the article said, for the last ten years."

Okay, so for a typical client that is a law student with average grades from a not-particularly-outstanding law school, how do you recommend treating the job-hunting process?"

"Foremost," Avitable says, "is to think of yourself as a product to be marketed. I know that sounds cold, but the reality is that you are offering something and must seek a market or markets which will be receptive to it. I would guess that 95% of all attorney jobs can be found in firms of 100 lawyers or less. These firms are usually regional and more likely to provide legal services only for a specific city or town. Such firms may or may



not advertise. So what I suggest is the use of a good job board like the one you're on now. That will give you a 'feel' of what's out there in the geographical regions and practice areas in which you choose to work.

"In addition to applying for jobs there, you need to develop a campaign that solicits opportunities that are not advertised. This means getting a list of all the firms in your area and sending out a cover letter and resume to the hiring partner or coordinator of each one, for you never know when you might get lucky. The fact is, statistics indicate that's how most law jobs are located. Finally, and this is the most obvious, I suspect, you must uncover possibilities from friends of parents, relatives, personal friends and anyone else who might know of an opening. That way, you will have covered all the bases."

When asked whether working with attorneys' hopes, dreams and problems every day is frustrating, he shakes his head. "I sleep well at night, if that's what you mean," he said. "You can see on our site tons of testimonials from attorneys who have refocused themselves and gone about their job searches in the right way and found jobs. That really makes me feel good. There's a great job out there for everyone," he concluded, "I firmly believe that. It's just a matter of knowing how to find it."