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Nine Non-Legal Jobs You Can (Really, Truly) Do With a Law Degree

Casey Berman, founder of Leave Law Behind, discusses the truth behind the phrase “You can do anything with a law degree” and lists nine real-life, non-legal jobs that are in fairly good alignment with an attorney’s skill set.

By CASEY BERMAN on November 17, 2013 at 6:28 PM

Many of us unhappy attorneys are tired, exhausted and frustrated with the practice of law. We are confused as to how, after all of the work we did in law school, all of the loans we took out, all of the hard work we did as an associate attorney, we now sit 3, 5, 8, 12 or more years in and wonder “I’m not happy. How did this happen?”

So, we decide, yes, we want to leave the law behind and do something else. We want to find another job that pays well, that provides us with meaning and self-worth. And we are encouraged by that oft repeated advice “You can do anything with a law degree.”

And so we begin to think of other things to do, anything. But soon, this optimistic phrase that is supposed to encourage us can actually begin to stress us out. First, it’s human nature, that if we have too many choices, it can be difficult to choose just one. We waffle, we are indecisive, and so instead of relishing the vast opportunity of choices a law degree and legal training put at our disposal, we often times become paralyzed by these potential choices. And we don’t choose any. And so we keep practicing law. And we remain unhappy.



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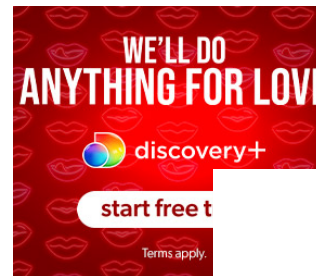
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Second, when we ask anyone what actual jobs you can do with a law degree, the answers are either too broad (Politics! Banking! Entrepreneurism!), require too much additional training and school (Become a doctor! Become a chemist!) or oftentimes, for people with ambition, student loan debt, and family bills to pay, are just straight-up unrealistic (Become a park ranger! Become a high school history teacher!).

What we lawyers who want to leave the law need is a realistic assessment of certain jobs that are non-legal, can utilize some or most of a lawyer’s general skill set (issue spotting, public speaking, analytical skills, client management, risk management, informative and engaging writing, and distilling complicated ideas into an easy-to-understand summary) and exist in roughly the same geographical and personal network that we lawyers have now.

I attempt to provide this below.

Now before we dive in, of course, to get these jobs there is a lot of difficult and time intensive work that needs to be done. We need to gain a better



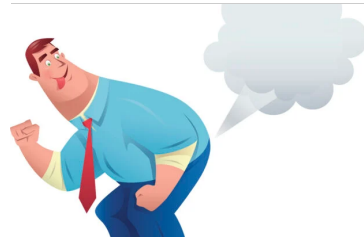
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understanding of our strengths, our confidences and our enjoyments (our “Unique Genius”), and try to find a role that involves this skill set and that we’d enjoy and be good at. We need to reposition our legal resume into one that aligns with this non-legal job. We need to [get out there](#) and network and meet and get coffees with people in these fields to (i) research which roles we may actually enjoy and (ii) gain warm leads into companies in order to increase our chances of being considered. It’s a lot of hard work, but it’s very do-able work.



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So without further ado, here are nine (mainly corporate) jobs that are very well aligned with a lawyer's skills:

HR Director/Manager: An HR Manager maintains and enhances a company's human resources by planning, implementing, and evaluating employee relations and human resources policies, programs, and practices. It involves assessing new hires and employees and being able to read people. It requires organizational skills, meeting deadlines, and fine attention to detail. HR Professionals must ensure the company's legal compliance by implementing federal and state requirements and even representing the company at hearings.

This role is very well suited for an employment or labor attorney with good people skills and a certain level of empathy.

Chief Operating Officer: The great thing about being in Operations is it touches all aspects of the business. The COO (and often times the VP of Operations) influence everything from strategy to sales to HR to finance and legal. More specifically, the COO ensures that a business has the proper operational controls, administrative & reporting procedures, and people systems in place to effectively grow the organization and to ensure financial strength and operating efficiency. The COO assesses important metrics, oversees and maintains the organization's infrastructure and serves as an overall glue for the company.

This role is ideal for an experienced attorney who is a natural leader, really enjoys affecting various levels and departments in an organization and has hands on experience counseling company executives in the past.

Internal Recruiter: A recruiter is focused on meeting a company's staffing objectives by recruiting and evaluating job candidates and advising hiring managers on courses of actions to take. Recruiters establish a company's recruiting requirements, create and maintain applicant source channels, “herd the cats”, manage all logistics of the hiring process and understand all legal and compliance requirements.

This is a great job for the lawyer who likes to put deals together, attend and lead recruiting events, has a good understanding of people and employment law and likes to interact with many different departments.

Chief Financial Officer: CFO may seem like a strange job for many lawyers who may have been liberal arts majors in college, but the CFO position can actually be in alignment with a lot of a lawyer's skills. You don't need to be a number cruncher to be a CFO (that's what Bookkeepers and Controllers are for). In companies big and small, the CFO is a true partner to the CEO and other executives. The CFO's main mandate is to develop and maintain the financial well-being of the company. The CFO's team provides financial projections and accounting services to enable the company to make informed and strategic decisions moving forward. And in smaller companies, the CFO oversees many administrative functions, like Legal, HR and Administration.

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This role is perfect for a lawyer who considers himself a “care taker” type, prides him or herself on attention to detail, conservative financial wherewithal, and a broad and strategic view on business.

Vice President of Business Development: This job can be a great fit for many attorneys, and is very important role in a company. The main job of the VP of Biz Dev is to build a company's market position by identifying, developing, defining, negotiating, and closing business deals, relationships, partnerships and opportunities. It's like sales, but even more strategic and aligns with a company's long term objectives. This job is proactive – it involves creating opportunities and accepting ownership of growing the company's business. It also optimizes much of one's legal skill set – it requires managing complex contract negotiations and working with the company's legal counsel.

This is a great role for a corporate, M&A or licensing attorney who likes to do deals, interact and grow relationships with people, be the face of an organization and contribute and execute on a company's short and long term strategy.

Vice President/Director of Corporate Development: Like the VP of Business Development, the VP (or Director) of Corporate Development role involves both proactive deal making and legal awareness and contract negotiations. As corporate development professionals are often high level executives, this work focuses on leading the development of company's growth through mergers, acquisitions or company reorganizations.

The main goal of this role is to fuel overall corporate growth, and would be great for that attorney who loves to deals, has real good interpersonal skills, the ability to ramp up quickly on the dynamics of certain industries and has experience in advising clients in M&A.

Project Management: A project manager accomplishes a project's objectives by planning, evaluating and shepherding the project's activities. The project manager owns and is accountable for the project at hand, from beginning to end – he or she manages the staffing, the timeline, the budget, the unexpected and the delivery. This role manages the relationship between the team members and the stakeholders at large. The project can be in tech, consumer goods, research, engineering, professional services ... really anything that requires getting from point A to point B.

This a great role for attorneys who enjoy mentoring staff, have leadership capabilities, are very interested in or like to geek out on certain types of product or industries, like digging deep into a task at hand and enjoy the pressure and reward of being accountable.

Content Writer: While not usually a senior position, a Content Writer's role is generally focused on writing engaging content for a company across any number of channels to market and promote the company's brand and mission. This can include blog posts, news articles, product page content, compliance documents, internal technical documents, social media posts, comments, emails, and presentations. And from time to time this role may also include editing and proof-reading documents and proposals. The role may require some marketing savvy and also necessitate one to be editorially and commercially minded.

This role can be a great fit for a younger attorney who loves to write (and is dying to write more than briefs, memos or other legal docs!), pays attention to detail, can meet deadlines, enjoys marketing and branding and has great research skills.

Corporate Trainer: Corporate trainers work in companies to teach skills and knowledge to employees. This might involve training new employees, teaching new skills or business systems to existing employees or helping with transitioning during a corporate merger or more. Corporate trainers are really just teachers and must be able to speak in front of a crowd, produce and

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understand training materials, work closely with individuals and evaluate how well employees have learned. They must critically choose which programs and materials are best for the subject being taught, must have great public speaking skills and must be able to motivate and manage training staff and budget.

This is a great role for a litigator who is sick of the adversarial nature of law, loves people and would rather collaborate, teach, inform and “perform” with others.

While in truth it may be unrealistic to say that you can do *anything* with a law degree, there really are concrete, real life, non-legal jobs out there the responsibilities of which would benefit hugely from one's legal skill set and can provide the career path, financial incentive and professional satisfaction in alignment with an unhappy lawyer's personal and professional goals.

Casey Berman (University of California, Hastings '99), a current chief strategy officer, investment banker and former in-house counsel based in San Francisco, is also the founder of [Leave Law Behind](#), a blog and community that focuses on helping unhappy attorneys leave the law.

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