

Lateral Outlook

In-House Counsel – Myths vs. Realities

Moving in-house is a big step; make certain you understand the pros and cons.



Given the myth that in-house legal careers always provide a better lifestyle with shorter hours and better pay, it's no wonder that so many attorneys are disappointed when they finally make the switch from law firm attorney to in-house counsel. Others with realistic expectations, however, find it is exactly what they want.

To ensure that you have the full picture before deciding on that make-or-break move, here's a run-down of some of the pros and cons of working in-house.

Pros

One client. As in house counsel, you essentially have one client – the company. This could be a plus if you enjoy representing one client on a range of matters. This is in contrast to many law firms where you may focus on one type of matter for a range of clients.

Increased involvement in business matters. In-house positions frequently offer an ideal base from which to gain both legal and non-legal experience, as in-house counsel are often more involved in the business end of corporate matters.

Forest for the trees. Would you rather focus on the forest or the trees within it? In-house positions often focus on the “forest” aspect, whereas law firms may tend to focus more on the “trees.” If you like being involved from the outside, setting goals and ensuring the overall success of a project, as distinct from going into minute details, then in-house may be more likely to appeal to you.

Cons

Fewer training opportunities. The majority of in-house positions do not offer the level of training programs and facilities that law firms offer. This is of particular concern for junior associates who have yet to develop a full skill set, especially for those who ultimately want to return to law firm practice. Those attorneys may not be able to compete later in their careers with law firm associates who have more training.

Fewer clients. With only one client, the company itself, in-house legal positions are dependant on the prosperity of the company. Consider very carefully where the company currently is and its direction prior to putting your career in the hands of its success, or lack thereof. Additionally, if you prefer working with a range of clients, working in-house will not usually offer that opportunity.

Not a 40-hour week. Many attorneys are surprised to learn that in-house counsel can work a similar number of hours as law firm associates, though maybe less than the top-billing ones! If you're after that elusive 9-5 position, this is not it.

Taking an in-house counsel position involves an amount of risk. What will make the difference when you do it – if you do it – will be whether or not you've done your research and preparation, and knowing whether or not the risk is an acceptable one.

Interested in learning more? We can help. Email us at info@elitelaterals.com or call Amy Savage at 202.280.2408