



## Specialized Law

advancing what's possible

# 4 Reasons You Might Want to Practice at a Small or Midsize Law Firm

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It's any law school graduate's dream: landing an associate position at a BigLaw firm straight out of school. While there is no doubt a certain level of prestige is associated with a big-name law firm, between a flurry of mergers and acquisitions and BigLaw partners jumping ship, job security is not necessarily a part of the package.

In fact, there are many benefits that practicing at a solo or small law firm can offer that their larger counterparts do not. For example, technology has leveled the playing field in recent years, giving smaller firms a real opportunity to compete with the deep-pockets of BigLaw. In addition, practicing at a small law firm often affords enhanced work-life balance and flexibility that is typically unattainable at a large firm. If you are eyeing a career move or considering going out on your own, here are a few reasons you may want to consider a small or midsize firm.



### Small Law is Lucrative

Companies increasingly recognize the value of using smaller or midsize firms for their litigation needs. Some of the larger firms are cost-prohibitive to be able to handle some of their business litigation matters, so companies are looking more aggressively toward alternative options.

“For the most part, industry-wide changes have opened up opportunities for small and medium-sized firms,” says Doug Pettit, shareholder and vice president of Pettit Kohn in San Diego. “In the last five to 10 years, mergers have evolved the marketplace and we are seeing a movement toward even bigger law firms. This opens up opportunities for smaller firms. The big firms have gotten almost too big, which allows small and medium firms to step in.”

### Greater Efficiencies and a Nimble Culture

Commonly, large corporate clients demand greater efficiency and the use of third-party intermediaries to provide their legal services (billing services, document management systems, etc.). Small firms have the ability to pivot more quickly than their larger counterparts

“Fortunately, as a smaller firm, we are nimble and able to adjust our internal systems to accommodate these demands without too much cost or disruption,” said Kellam Parks, managing member of Parks Zeigler in Virginia Beach.

Smaller firms may also be in a better position to accept contingency fees or alternative fee arrangements that larger firms might not want to commit to.

“There’s a potential upside to the firm in handling contingency work and a number of attorneys here enjoy that kind of work,” Pettit says. “For some of us, if we were at a larger firm, that might not be a possibility.”

### More Interesting Work

Small law practices typically employ generalists who may have a specialty area or two, allowing them to work on several different types of cases—as opposed to large firms, where practice areas are more narrow.

“There’s been much more flexibility for each of our offices to spend more time in the areas they like rather than focusing

on issues they may not have as much of an interest in,” notes Rick Rumrell, partner at Rumrell, McLeod & Brock PLLC in St. Augustine, Florida.

A closer-knit firm culture also means that laterals at smaller firms may have additional opportunities to work in different areas, offering a chance for less experienced attorneys to work in new areas of the law and focus on matters they may want to specialize in.

### Better Work-Life Balance

Long hours and all-nighters are part of any associate’s career—there is usually no escaping it. In fact, thanks to the almighty billable hour, the legal culture is known for encouraging overwork. Except if you work at a small firm, where work-life balance is generally more in focus and alternative fee arrangements may be more commonplace, putting less weight on billable time. Countless surveys show that more hours do not always equate to greater productivity. If you are juggling a family and a career, working at a smaller firm will likely give you time to have a life outside of the office.



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