

Four Rules for Gracefully Leaving Your Small Law Job

You're an attorney working for a small law firm, but you recently accepted a new position elsewhere. Whether you're making a lateral move to another firm or quitting law firm life altogether, bowing out tactfully will do you favors many times over in your future career. So how do you handle the impending breakup? Below are four rules for quitting a small law firm career gracefully—and making a positive impression on both your former and new employers.

- 1. Keep it simple.** It's important to keep in mind that submitting a resignation is just another business transaction. It's part of doing business, and your boss knows this. Though your boss may seem initially surprised to hear your news, it's nothing they haven't experienced before. Deliver your resignation calmly, with a simple explanation like, "I found an opportunity I can't pass up." Further explanation or details are likely to just make things awkward. A short, simple explanation is all you need. Keep in mind that you might bump into your old boss or coworkers in the future, such as in court or at legal events, so preserving good rapport is important.
- 2. Make a clean client hand-off.** Remember: the client is still the most important party, even when you won't be working with them anymore. Attorneys working for small firms typically have more client contact than those working for bigger firms, which makes it even more important to keep detailed notes and make thoughtful introductions. You have likely built trusting relationships with your clients, so the hand-off to whoever is taking your place needs to be smooth and professional. Err on the side of over communicating: leave plenty of notes for your successor, and if possible, make sure you warmly introduce your clients to the attorney who will be filling your shoes. The worst thing you can do is leave your clients and coworkers confused, frustrated and with a bad taste in their mouth for your lack of effort.
- 3. Don't steal clients.** Smaller law firms typically have a smaller client base than bigger law firms, so they are likely to feel especially protective of their clients. Although it might be tempting to convince your clients to follow you to your next gig, it's generally not worth it. You don't want to violate any non-compete agreements you signed with your old firm. Stealing clients could land you in potential legal trouble.
- 4. Keep the chitchat professional.** Lateral hires are getting more common among small law firms, and it is not uncommon for contacts at your new firm to have relationships with people at your old firm. You never really know who knows who, so avoid burning bridges or bad mouthing your previous employer to new coworkers. Keep your grievances for people in your inner circle. Even if you had a terrible experience, keeping your review contained to only those you trust will serve you in the long run.

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