

24 alternative careers for lawyers

START-UP FOUNDER

We've written extensively about the ups and downs of starting your own business. It's certainly not for the faint-hearted. However, if you can stick it out, the freedom and autonomy that comes with running your own business is second to none. Lawyers are particularly well-suited to starting their own businesses, as they (typically) have the intellect and commercial acumen that start-up-land demands. This option is a big leap, and it's not a decision to make lightly, as your first few years will likely be spent on zero salary and not a whole lot of sleep.

Having grown a couple of businesses over the years we know the work that goes into it. Our best advice? Find a way to combine your experience and deliver a service in a better way. Law is a great business, think hard about leveraging what you can in law with your new idea or venture. Also think about how you can add value to clients with your existing skills even in a new venture.

IN-HOUSE AT A START-UP

If you can't quite stomach the thought of starting your own business from scratch, why not reap the benefits of start-up life, without taking on board the risk and the stress that comes with being the founder? Start-ups often need in-house lawyers. Or, if you're a little bit over being a lawyer, there are innumerable other roles from business development to operations management that you could fill. The salary might be less than you'd earn in practice, but the perks will more than likely make up for it and there is huge potential for high performers to grow with the business.

Obviously this is not “leaving the law”... we erred with our title and should have called it “leaving big law”. Either way, combining your business and legal skills is a great option for anyone who wants to do something differently.

BUY A CONVENTIONAL BUSINESS

Many of you will have a variety of experience working part time or full time in other businesses. Some of you may even have a family business. Buying your own, setting up your own conventional shop front, selling stuff online through Amazon, or whatever more “conventional” business you pursue is a great option. Now for more junior people capital may be a problem, but there are a lot of more senior lawyers who want a change who can invest in a franchise or licence a product. Don’t discount more conventional businesses if you are looking to change.

JOURNALIST

Journalism is a natural role for someone who has spent years writing. Lawyers typically have stellar interview and investigatory skills, and a real interest in telling people's stories. The road to the top as a journalist is a long one, but there are opportunities in various formats if you're willing to start at the beginning. You might need to re-learn how to write non-legalese, but that should be fun.

PR

Another alternative career option for lawyers is public relations. If you're any

good at networking and building professional relationships, PR is a viable option for you. Most positions are within large corporate firms, but there is a number of smaller, boutique agencies popping up, where you may find a more hands-on role. Many agencies niche by industry as well, so if you're interested in sports, you might well find a PR agency that specialises in just that.

DIGITAL MARKETING

The marketing world has expanded greatly with the advent of social media and digital marketing. If you're more on the creative side, marketing is an alternative career for lawyers to consider. You can easily teach yourself the digital marketing skills required with one of the many online courses out there. Once you've learnt the ropes, you have the option of working in-house (at a start-up or an established business), at an agency or freelancing.

TEACHING AND ACADEMIA

Perhaps you enjoyed law school so much you never wanted to leave? Well, you have the option of going back as a law professor. The world of academia is changing and you will likely need a Masters-level or higher qualification to get a teaching gig, but the jobs are there if you want them. Becoming a teacher can be hugely satisfying, helping others love the law (or something else). So, naturally, it can be a career that gives you a huge amount of personal value.

ACCOUNT MANAGER

If you have the right temperament and good client relationship skills, account management in an industry like advertising or NewLaw is another option to consider. In the typical account management role, you would manage and maintain existing client relationships and be the intermediary between the client and the project team. It's a dynamic and engaging role that requires high-level problem-solving skills. If you are a bookworm or prefer to keep your head down, this might not be a good fit for you.

PROJECT MANAGER

Ah, yes, the mysterious project manager. What do they actually do? Well, they manage projects (funny that) in a variety of businesses and contexts. Like account management, it requires strong organisational skills, high-level problem-solving ability, emotional intelligence and basic people management skills. You also need to have a keen intellect to be able to spot gaps, as well as to plan and execute. This is a great career option that can take you across a range of industries.

RECRUITER

The recruitment industry is always on the lookout for smart, commercial professionals. Whether it is in legal recruitment, or working in a myriad of other niche areas, recruitment is a real career option for lawyers. If you love to be paid for what you put in, enjoy helping people, have high EQ and some commercial nous, it could be a good fit for you. Recruitment also massively expands your network, give you useful industry insights and allows you to keep being a trusted advisor to your candidates and clients.

MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT

If you're dead set on leaving the law, but aren't quite ready to give up your cushy salary, management consulting is an option. It can be a demanding career and you can prepare to work similar hours as you would in practice. The upside is that you get exposure to a wide range of businesses and industries and can choose to specialise over time. This role requires high-level analytical skills (which usually isn't an issue for lawyers) and a high degree of creativity (which can be a problem for some).

CONTENT WRITER / COPYWRITER

So, you enjoy the creativity of writing, but you're not cut out for the high-pressure of journalism? Copywriting or content writing are two options available to you. You can choose to work in-house, at marketing or advertising agencies, or as a freelancer. There are countless online media outlets these days, so you could slowly start the transition by submitting an article or two a month before taking the leap and leaving the law altogether.

POLITICIAN

Some of the biggest players in Australian politics today have law degrees. Whilst you probably won't be the next Malcolm Turnbull, there are many options at both the state and federal government level. If you want to take your lying skills to the next level then this is the career for you. Just make sure you secure a safe seat so you don't have to work too hard come election time. It goes without saying that this can be a risky career in times of great change and leadership turmoil.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

This might sound like a big leap from law, but it actually isn't. If your firm has an in-house BD manager, you could start by showing interest in making the move across. Otherwise, be prepared to highlight how your BD skills have brought in work for your team when applying for BD roles. This role requires strong interpersonal skills and typically is the driving force for preparing pitches and tenders, as well as following leads and managing existing client relationships.

CAREER MANAGER

Career change is part and parcel for professionals at all levels, particularly as our economy continues to move in the direction of more flexible, casualised and part-time work. The career trajectories of full-time professionals are also at the mercy of the economy and technological change, which are causing huge flux. As a result, the best of any profession will always need guidance on their options and how to move up their current hierarchy or step sideways to a new one. Career management requires you to build deep industry knowledge and networks.

AUTHOR

Could you be the next John Grisham? Or, maybe non-fiction is more your style. Either way, you won't know until you have a crack and get your book out there. Writing is one of the most important skills you can learn, period. Many people have the desire to write that book that's been in their mind for years and years but never get around to it. There is no question that writing can be a lonely pursuit and the challenges are rife, especially if you are prone to procrastination. But, for many people, writing a book can be empowering

and hugely therapeutic.

MEDIATOR

Lawyers with enough experience in the litigation and advocacy side of practice in areas like family law, consumer law and general commercial litigation might consider stepping sideways into mediation. The alternative disputes area is a growing one, as the legal system and government seek to drive efficiency. It can be quite adversarial, but the purpose of mediation is to find common ground and avoid full-blown litigation.

INVESTMENT BANKER

If you aren't willing to give up the high status of being a lawyer just yet, pursuing a career as an investment banker is another option open to you. It's ideal for those who thrive in a competitive environment and in high-pressure situations. While the demands and dynamics can be the same as BigLaw in many ways, the big difference is you are rewarded based on your success. It's highly incentivised and can be hugely lucrative, without the lock step slowing you down! Big bucks on offer for those who like to work hard and play hard.

CONTRACT MANAGER

Who better to manage thousands of contracts than a lawyer who is an expert in drafting them? Many big organisations have contract managers and procurement managers who negotiate and are responsible for contracts.

INSURANCE INDUSTRY ROLES

There are many potential commercial, investigatory and regulatory roles in insurance companies for lawyers. Everything from investigating claims to regulatory change. The insurance industry is heavily regulated and can be a great career option for lawyers to consider.

REGULATORY INVESTIGATION WORK

Regulatory investigation work is another alternative career option for lawyers. Many government agencies have large investigation teams that work on both physical investigations and policy matters. Options for Australian lawyers include the ACCC, Federal Police, ASIC and the ATO, just to mention a few.

POLICY ADVISORS IN GOVERNMENT

Many arms of government have huge policy teams that are a great fit for lawyers with an interest in policy and regulatory development. While a lot of the roles start out at a junior level, there is the opportunity to progress. The work can also be incredibly important and rewarding. You might have a particular passion for financial regulatory work, or access to justice or competition law, and get a big kick out of being involved with developing policy directly.

PRIVATE EQUITY / PRIVATE CLIENT ASSOCIATE

A lot of private equity firms hire lawyers with corporate and PE experience to move over to the commercial side. Most of these roles involve a significant amount of deal management and will tap into your legal skills, making this a great alternative career for lawyers.

FUNDS AND FINANCIAL SERVICES ORGANISATIONS ROLES

Lawyers with funds, superannuation or financial services regulatory experience have the option of moving into large financial services firms. If you have regulatory experience with issues around market conduct, white collar crime, insider trading, or the superannuation and funds industries, there could be an interesting regulatory role for you at one of these firms.