

RETURNING TO PRACTICE AFTER TIME OFF

There are many reasons why individuals may leave the active practice of law and then later choose to return. For some, they took time off to raise children or to care for ailing parents. Others leave to work in law related positions that did not include actively representing clients. No matter what your reason, if you have taken time away from practicing law but now want to return, here are some things to consider in preparation for your job search.

I. Update Your Skills

After having been away from law practice you will need to update your skills. Before you begin searching for a position, take a refresher course in legal research. Visit the law library to re-familiarize yourself with the books and receive training on Westlaw and Lexis/Nexis.

II. Update Your Experience

Securing the first position after time off will be the most difficult as employers will want to see recent experience. Consider volunteering in some capacity where you can get current legal experience. Contact a local public interest organization and offer to volunteer. Talk with your jurisdiction's bar association to find out if they have a volunteer lawyer program that will refer pro bono cases to you. Connect with solo practitioners in your area who could use your help.

III. Update Your Education

Even if your jurisdiction does not require continuing legal education (CLE), start attending CLE programs. These programs will bring you up to speed on the state of the law in a particular practice area. They will also afford you an opportunity to meet and network with practitioners to find volunteer or permanent positions. Even though you are experienced, consider taking a CLE course for new attorneys. Returning to the basics will remind of all you do know while helping you understand changes in the law that occurred while you were away.

IV. Update Your Network

Get involved with local bar associations. Attend both social and professional functions including any annual meetings. Volunteer for a committee. Consider writing an article for the association's newsletter. You want people to view you as an active, knowledgeable member of the bar. You also want to meet as many people as you can who are practicing in your area. These are the people you will be seeking employment from in the very near future. Touch base with your law school classmates and/or former colleagues to let them know you will be returning to practice. Some firms and even corporations have "alumni" programs that may be of help to you in your search.

V. Update Your Expectations

Recognize that, to be effective in your job search, you will need time to get reacquainted with the legal market. Research employers to find out what is available in your market and what you might be able to expect for a salary. Realize that it is unlikely that you can return to the same level of practice that you left. Conduct informational interviews to find out how returning attorneys are treated as laterals and temper your expectations accordingly.