

I recently read an on-line article from a London newspaper that Baker & McKenzie cut six New York associates in an office of 140 lawyers including 60 partners as part of a range of cost-cutting measures introduced in response to market conditions. The article used the English term saying the firm had announced “redundancies”, a definition for which is “having lost your job because the employer no longer needs you.”

Baker & McKenzie, of course, is not alone. Layoffs of associates have been announced at Foley Hoag in Boston, Parker Poe in Charlotte and Blank Rome in Philadelphia and seem likely at Kirkland and Ellis in Chicago.

Somehow being “redundant” seems to say it with more of a kick in the pants than simply being laid off.

Imagine becoming redundant?

You went to a law school that’s hard to get into and did so well in your interviews during the beginning of your second year that you got a summer position at one of these firms. While there in the summer, you worked hard (or not) and were fortunate enough to get an offer to join the firm upon graduation.

You have been there for what—3 years—and you are now “redundant”? Who says? How was that decision made? Were you on the committee that decided that six associates should be cut? Were you on the committee that decided that YOU should be cut?

Was there any discussion in the firm about having all partners and associates in the “law firm family” take a small hit so that your position could be saved?

Were you given an opportunity to have training in another area of law and move to another department or office?

Is there an associates’ union at the firm—one that has the right to bargain on all issues related to work conditions for associates including pay, hours, abusive partners, and becoming redundant? Are you aware of an associates’ union at any other firm?

What were you told about your being redundant? Were you told that it had anything to do with your job performance? If so, was that inconsistent with your prior reviews?

Did you take clinical courses during law school? Are you prepared to go into private practice on your own or in a firm of less than 5 lawyers? Have you ever worked at such a firm? Do you know the range of legal options you have?

Since few openings are advertised or are known by headhunters, do you know how to go about making a decision about what you want to do and how to market yourself in order to find such a position?

Having advised and provided career planning for lawyers for 25 years, I can safely say that the worst effect of being laid off is beginning to believe the “redundant” label and deciding that no one needs you.

Rest assured, you have options and you ARE needed!!