

Attorney's Counsel[®] —

Does your resume rise to the Bar?

How to Evaluate a Law Firm's Culture

It is crucial to know the culture of a firm when applying to work there. It is as important as the practice area and size of the firm.

Law firms grow and change over time. People come and go, firms' names change, and, like a family, stories get passed down, memorabilia is honored, and those in charge have stories of their own. All of that contributes to a firm's culture.

While you can't learn all the inside secrets and lore from where you are now, you can learn the general way the firm (and the employees) views itself and how the employees view the firm. And you can decide if you think you will fit in.

Every firm is different. That is one reason why you do not apply to every firm. Each firm has its own language. Knowing that language and history can make you the ideal candidate, someone who already fits in. Or, it can eliminate the firm from your search.

Please remember, you also have decision-making power. So, do your research. Try to learn the firm's culture as best you can from the outside to determine if you want to work there, if you would fit into the culture, or if you are looking for a work environment with more structure and less humor, more supervision and less flextime options, or a combination of what is perfect for you.

How to determine a firm's culture?

1. Look at the firm's website.

What do the lawyers' bios say and what do the photos look like? Keep in mind this is how the firm chooses to advertise itself.

2. Look at LinkedIn to see what associates' and partners' status updates are.

What LinkedIn groups are they members of? Where have they previously worked? Where did they go to law school? Undergrad?

If many lawyers at one firm, previously worked at another firm, or if they all went to the same law school, it is likely the office is more collegial. They may have known each other a long time and know many people in common. However, that may be true of any firm and practice area.

3. Ask employees what they liked most and least about the firm and how their spouse and friends would describe the firm.

Often a person's quality of life as judged by the people closest to them can be very telling. When speaking with the employees, consider if you would like to work with them.

4. Ask these questions:

- Do the associates work as a team or focus on getting ahead on their own?
- How much autonomy does an associate have over their work?
- How do people interact within the firm, up and down the hierarchy?
- What are the stories people repeatedly tell about the firm and how is it viewed in the legal community? Yes, even gossip can tell you something about the firm's culture

5. Once you have done your preliminary research there is still work to do. If you are invited for an interview, notice everything

- Look at the offices - everything about them, the art on the walls, the carpet, and the desks.

Jessica Silverstein

646.783.8537

JESEsq@AttorneysCounselNY.com

www.AttorneysCounselNY.com

© Stillman Klieger Inc.

Attorney's Counsel[®] —

Does your resume rise to the Bar?

Are the offices new? Do you like them? Are they filthy? I have interviewed in pristine offices, and I was happier there. I have also interviewed in an office with a bug crawling across the desk and knew that was not for me.

While you do not have to love the style of the office, it should be someplace you would not mind going to each day. If the office next to you has sports pendants up and the pencil cup (if people still write anything at all) is shaped like a helmet, maybe they really love sports, or maybe it's a dare.

- Notice the aesthetics and also the personalities.

Does the receptionist smile and personally greet the employees as they enter? Do they stop and chat? Do employees seem to change their attitude depending upon who else is in the room?

Determine what type of office culture you will enjoy working in, and then try to find a firm to match. In this economy, when there are often multiple perfect-fit candidates, it will come down to a great interview and a cultural fit.

Do they want to work with you? Will you fit with their firm culture? If not, the other person will get the job, regardless of how exactly you match the qualifications. "Chemistry" is often the key to who is hired and who is not.

Bottom Line

A law firm's culture is its personality. You do not have to like everyone and not everyone will like you. However, as with any new relationship, you hope there will be mutual respect, intellectual stimulation, and often a great sense of humor. Do your research, and you will improve your chances of having the firm you like, like you back.

More Information

Listen to Jessica's [30-minute interview about law firm culture](#) with Tara Kachaturoff on BlogTalkRadio.

Originally published on Job-Hunt.org

<http://www.job-hunt.org/attorney-job-search/how-to-evaluate-firm-culture.shtml>