

New Attorney Salaries

I know I am going to get a lot of flack about this but here goes.

I ran an ad on Craigslist for a new attorney and requested salary expectations. I received about 40 responses with varying salary expectations but they averaged around \$40,000-\$45,000. The ad was for an attorney that graduated no earlier than 2011.

Shortly after, I posted a blind ad that stated the following:

ATTORNEY (Orlando, FL)

Small law firm needs an attorney. No experience necessary.
Salary \$24,000/yr

I have received about 20 responses to the ad and approximately 1/3 of the original ad applicants responded to the blind ad. I did receive one response that said "\$24k for an attorney? Go f*** yourself!" (Edited)

What does that say about the current job market for new attorneys? Personally, I think the opportunity to work for even \$24,000/yr is one that an attorney could take for six months to a year while looking elsewhere. It avoids the large blank space on the resume or non-legal employment. It also provides relevant legal experience.

How would it benefit you if your associates tended to leave every six months?

Lesley Hoenig, Michigan

The blind ad was an attempt to gauge the market and determine salary. If I was a new grad attorney with no job, I would consider starting my own practice or take a job for as little as \$24,000/yr to get my feet wet and then start my practice.

As for any benefit to my firm, the thought is to see what they are like in action and then offer an increased salary after 3-6 months if I am happy with them.

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Paying a full-time attorney (45+ hours a week for most of us) \$24,000 a year would violate minimum wage laws if the profession was not otherwise exempt.

Brian J. Hughes, Massachusetts

You realize that is (barely) above the poverty line? It's hard to get by on that.

If the idea is to offer increased salary after 3-6 months, I bet you'd see a better reaction if you included something like "room for advancement or significantly increased salary to hard worker".

Does that at least come with benefits?

The other thing I would think, is that the next job they apply for is going to ask what they made with you. When they tell them only \$24,000, then they will lowball them.

Thomas Almquist, Florida

I think taking someone on like that would probably be more headache than benefit. You'll have to micro-manage anyone who'd accept that position at that salary, effectively creating more work than savings. It's likely that this person would either be incompetent or possibly even reckless. I adhere strongly to the old adage that you get what you pay for.

Raising the salary might be helpful even in the case you want to burn and churn associates. I'd suspect at 24, you'd have people jumping ship the day after you hired them, the moment a better offer came in or even on the eve of an important trial. If your intent is to grow your practice while permanently retaining associates, you may want to ante up and have a good start out of the gate. I suggest examining your goals and subsequently employing whatever tactics are necessary.

Michael A. Huerta, New York

Let's say you lived in a region where there was a drought. If you set up a store with a sign that said "water for sale, name your price" you would probably see that most people would offer you a price similar to what they pay now for bottled water. However, if you put up a sign that said "water for sale, \$20 a gallon" you would still get plenty of customers, including maybe some of the same people who would prefer to pay \$2 a gallon. Even though \$20 a gallon is not their preferred price, they need to have water.

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Right now there is a job drought. People are desperate. So even when they would very much like to work for \$40,000 a year, many of them would be willing to accept \$24,000 because they need to have a job.

However, when you do this with water is it called price gouging and it is generally considered unethical.

Randy Herman, North Carolina

Would it be possible to hire the person on a part time contract basis? I have noticed that even many larger firms are doing this - my former associate worked part time for me for 6 months, then found a second position part time at a large firm and was both positions for another 6 months before finally being hired by the other firm.

Carolyn Elefant, Washington, DC

I didn't make 24K my first year as a solo, but I knew it was a long term investment. Many of the new graduates I meet seem incapable of that concept. I agree in the ideal world a starting salary would be much, much higher. But, at least where I am, the usual starting salary is zero because there are almost no jobs whatsoever. The 24K would have definite value if it also resulted in skills that would be transferable and/or make it possible to bring in one's own business.

Deborah Zaccaro Hoffman, Ohio

I was hired in Tulsa over 10 years ago starting at \$30,000.

Carol King, Oklahoma

This shows how hard times are: Attorneys can't pay for competent help and new attorneys can't find work that pays enough to put a decent roof over their head and to eat.

Pawnee A. Davis, Washington, DC

To answer your question, it says the market sucks. I have no problem with you paying what the market will bear. Of course, if are below market, you won't keep your associate very long. If your associate starts making you money, then increasing his salary will make sense, and will keep your associate happier. Good luck!

Michael A. Blake, Connecticut

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Tons of problems with that salary. With the salary that low it would be impossible to cover student loan debt. And that salary will probably only cover the loan payment and cheap meals. And even then the person would have to be living with their parents or have a spouse who makes enough to support the household. Before I found my first attorney job 5 months after bar results I made 15 dollars an hour at a small firm doing administrative work and 25 dollars an hour teaching court reporters. I was part time at both places so I still had flexibility for my job search. I taught in the morning and worked at the firm 4 afternoons a week. I brought home about 700 a week between the two. New grad salary with no experience full time should be, minimum 40 to 50k. I would just go sit in courtrooms and watch, hang out in the law library before I would take your salary. Even fresh out of school I would have kept looking. 6 months experience is not really enough experience to make a difference in our competitive job market. Either you will hire a new grad or you won't. If you look @ job postings its either brand new attorney, 2 to 3 years of experience or 5 plus years on most positions. With that in mind, your offer isn't as attractive as you may think. Furthermore, turnover would be ridiculous. you think the person who has to take that job is going to have a good attitude and care about your practice? Not worth it to me.
Gabrielle D.R. Smith, Texas

My starting salary at a small law firm 20 years ago was \$37K. There were lower paying jobs offered at the time, but virtually all of them promised the potential for an increase in salary after a short evaluation period and/or promised a percentage of the revenues the attorney brought in.

Kevin W. Grierson, Virginia

- 1) You get what you pay for. If I was forced to take a job paying \$24k I would put in my time, not put forth my best effort, and not really invest in the work since my employer was clearly not invested in me. And I'd continue looking for a new job the whole time.
- 2) I am always suspect of a potential employer who says "a raise is coming soon". If you think the job is really worth \$30 or \$40k, then pay that to begin with, and get rid of anyone who doesn't merit that pay.

Betsy Ehlen

When I started my first job as an attorney I was offered 3000 per month (low for our market). I was advised to use it as a learning opportunity in which the "quid pro quo" was that I was paid little but would get invaluable experience. In addition, I was advised there could be room for additional salary after 6+ months based on good performance. (No benefits, paid time off, etc. either)

The one issue was that there was truly no real commitment from me. I was with a large corporation for 12 years prior so commitment was never a problem. However, I never felt I was an asset to the firm but rather there

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to soak up as much as I could and then move on as soon as something better came along. After about three months I was offered a job (that started the next week) and I literally walked in the office and quit right then and there. Fortunately there was nothing major (trial, etc.) at that moment but I guarantee you that would not have made a difference.

Basically the optics of the job changed me from trying to do the best for the company to me trying to do the best for me. I NEVER thought of myself as "that" type of employee but it was quite shocking how easily I adapted that philosophy. Mind you, I was fresh out of law school but already had been in the workforce for many years.

I believe had I been offered a job with an *apparent* graduated pay scale (increases after 90 days or bonuses paid for meeting certain goals) I would have been much more apt to stay and commit to the business. As it was though, I felt like I was being used as cheap labor and acted appropriately.

Adrian Hoppes

I hired an associate at 42500 who had experience in large firms but doing all doc review no depositions no court no client contact. Said they wanted to become a real attorney. Started coming in very quickly at like 9:30-10:00, and despite bringing to their attention always fell back into that with no real work ethic. Said that because I described the firm as family atmosphere and not sweat shop that it was ok. When things are not real busy relax, but when stuff has to get done, work.

Really many missing the work ethic my father I instilled in me.

Thank you

Anthony R. Minchella, Connecticut

Honestly, most attorneys are not even worth 24000 per year. I would rather pay that to a paralegal. Even experienced attorneys I have hired don't know the first thing about a retainer agreement or how to do discovery requests. Think about the time you hired an attorney-- if you were paying someone 200 or 300 per hour what kind of results would you expect and what kind of customer service.

Most people want something for nothing. There are few who earn it. I nix people who ask in the job interview "is the salary negotiable". I hire people who say, what can I do to increase my salary.

I think 24000 is fair as a base and its more than I am willing to pay. If you can earn 100000 a year in revenue a year for the firm, then lets surely renegotiate. If you barely can answer the phone and can handle one 2000 revenue case on your own per month--- seriously, you don't need to work at a small firm. Go do doc reviews at 18 per hour at a big firm or get out of the practice of law.

Rinky S Parwani, Florida

The way I've done that, successfully, is to start the lawyer part time at an hourly rate. The first time I did that it was an admitted lawyer who responded to my listing at the local law school (a great resource) for a law clerk. That attorney eventually left law to make more money in another line of work, but showed me how useful it is to have someone who can cover hearings. My current associate came in part time at an hourly rate, and proved himself to the point where he now has a decent salary and bonus deal. Part of his deal is a portion of fees generated from clients he brings to the firm. After 3 years, he is managing his own cases, relying on me for input rather than having me tell him what to do, and we're able to take on twice as much work as when it was just me.

Wendell Finner, Florida

If you're concerned about the attorney being worth the investment, I'd give them incentives to bring in revenue and new business right from the start. \$24K doesn't sound so bad if the attorney got to keep, for example, 25% of revenues from any business they brought in themselves (that was the deal at my first job). Or, you could set a target goal for revenue, and give them a bonus after a certain amount of revenue or billable hours each quarter.

With salary incentives, you can make even a fairly low salary job appealing because you make it clear that they have the opportunity to earn more right away if they do well. If those incentives are lacking, I think you'll find the turnover so high that it won't be worth it to hire anyone.

Kevin W. Grierson

The job market from 10 years ago is not the same as it is now. Unfortunately, I believe the attorney salaries will continue to go down as more and more attorneys are produced. I am in Orlando, where we have two fairly new un-ranked law schools (fourth tier?). Jobs are scarce. As a new grad, would you rather take a low paying non-law job or get some practical legal experience that may help you find another job?

Let's not forget how much time a new attorney needs to learn how things are done. Law school does not prepare an attorney for law practice. Internship or practice based classes are helpful. They don't know how to do very basic things. When the attorney has 1-2 years experience, then they should be able to function well. What exactly is the new grad bringing to the table?

Higher paying jobs are just not there in numbers great enough to employ all of the graduates and many good candidates are shut out of the market for

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various reasons, including a low ranking school. There are many law firms that would rather hire a low ranking UF, Miami or FSU grad before hiring a top 25% FAMU or Barry grad.

We now have 12 law schools in Florida:

Ave Maria
Barry
Fla A&M
Fla Coastal
Fla Intl
Fla State
Nova
Stetson
St Thomas
Thomas Cooley
U Florida
U Miami

When I finished law school in 1996, there were six law schools. In the July Fla Bar Exam this year, there were 3,000 test takers and 2,373 passed the bar exam. We have a February exam also but the number is a lot lower. So low estimate is 2,500 new lawyers each year. That's a lot of new lawyers each year. Where will they go?

Dennis Chen, Florida

I think a lot of you (but not all) are missing his point. He wasn't looking to hire an attorney for \$24k. He was curious as to how bad the market was.

Really really bad apparently. I couldn't find a job for a few months out of law school, tried to go solo (not knowing any business development or having any legal skills) for a few months, then started to look for a job again. 2002-2003. Starting salary was \$55k but jumped to 6 figures in less than two years and I knew this. But I was just ecstatic with the \$55k. But after renting an apartment and paying student loans, that \$55k was very very thin after taxes. I got one hefty raise but then quit 6 months later heh.

When you are looking for a job you are desperate. If, and this is a big if, I accepted a \$24k job I'd be looking every day still. Beware the long lunches ;)

Joseph D. Dang, California

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Reading the posts to this thread, I am so happy to have practiced many years as a solo. I do have 4 great paralegals instead of any associates. I do have to start planning for what happens when I go to my reward, and this thread is the reason I keep putting such planning off.

Jim Winiarski

You mean because you waste so much time here, you haven't had a chance to do it? :)

David Rubin, Missouri

You MIGHT get a competent paralegal on a contract basis with that budget - maybe 10 hours/week. *Maybe*.

IMO, anyone hired at this rate would not work out for a myriad of reasons. And, they'd resent every minute working for you. Plus, they'd be gone just when you were getting them trained.

If this was my budget, I'd look to hire a new attorney on a contract basis or an experienced paralegal.

Good luck.

Russ Carmichael

I have found that at these rates (\$12/hr) per diem or contract work is better for all involved or I review my cases and see if there are cases which are better for all involved if referred to someone else.

Brian.M.Baillie

I think that is an interesting experiment you conducted. Yes, it is sad that young attorneys are willing to work for \$24k, but here in Texas, the starting salary for new attorneys at the Attorney General's Office is around \$28-30k, so \$24k is not totally ridiculous in my neck of the woods.

Tracia Y. Lee, Texas

I'm waiting for an applicant to write that they saw my post on Solosez. So far, no one has mentioned it in their email.

This is the great divide between employer/employee mentality in my opinion. Employers need sufficient receivables to cover employee salary, taxes, benefits, and overhead. Employers need happy employees, but even more, they need their employee/associates, to bring in more than they cost. And sadly, at least for me, the majority of the associates I've hired end up costing me more than they bring to the table, at least for the first few years. The more honest of my associates through the years have admitted that when they opened their own shop, they were horrified at how little of the billable dollar they were truly able to pocket at the end of the day. If they considered this issue earlier in the ballgame, we would all have been more profitable and much happier. After nearly 20 years of private practice, I'm weary of paying salaries to people who do outside work while on my clock, insist on boosted salaries because they are billing work on uncollectable accounts, or who simply do not work at expected levels beyond the honeymoon period after they are hired. I'm generally an optimist, but I've lost hundreds of thousands of dollars writing off work that associates insisted on doing, but couldn't grasp that their pet clients were unwilling or unable to pay. So, while I hate for anyone to work at slave wages, I also can't afford to pay people what they'd like to be paid when they can't or won't bring in receivables to cover their overhead to me. It's a frustrating cycle.

I have no problem bringing work into my office. I have problems finding qualified people to complete the work timely, correctly enough to reasonably bill and cover their expected pay range. I'd also like to be paid what I'm worth, but it's harder and harder to do this as overhead goes up. I wish that potential associates would focus less on what they need and more on what I need in order to pay what they desire. Then we'd both profit and be less frustrated.

Vicki Levy Eskin, Florida

I appreciate what Dennis is trying to do, (figure out what the market will bear), but I don't think that is the right question. The right question is how much should I pay to attract a quality attorney and keep them long term, and a second question is, how do I find them?

The market right now is so bad that I am confident if Dennis made a posting where he asked for someone to volunteer and he would act as a mentor while they got "real life" experience, he would get at least a few responses. That does not mean that he would be happy with the work product or work ethic.

Where in the world you are will determine how much the bottom of the barrel price really is, but in Maryland 40 to 50k is pretty low. What that means is that anyone who is a self-motivated problem solver with both intelligence and a drive to get more business will quickly make friends in the industry and find new job opportunities. If you are paying the bottom of the barrel they will not stick around. This has been said about 20 sometimes so far in this thread.

What has not been mentioned so far is that there are other factors any employee will take into account. A major one is job satisfaction and another is the job atmosphere. If an employee is satisfied with what they are doing and also comfortable with their coworkers, they will accept a lower salary for much longer than if either of the above are missing. Job satisfaction can be provided by giving an employee meaningful work. This is pretty easy. Atmosphere is harder. If it is a small firm or solo practitioner, the attorney(s) already present must not be a jerk, must be friendly, and must lead by example. If you go home every day

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at 5pm, don't expect your new associate to stick around, if you do that will probably lead to a lowering in their quality of life which will lead them to leaving quicker than you might expect.

So how do you attract attorneys that will stick around and do a good job? Well for starters do not mention salary in your advertisement, do not ask about salaries either. You are trying to lure a good attorney to you in the same manner that a new attorney is trying to get an interview. In your add you need to mention the interesting parts of your business. What are the things that will convince the good attorney to come work for you? How often will they be in court? Are they going to be researching new legal areas? Do you do appellate work? Are you looking for someone to grow new areas of business? If all the work you are offering is treadmill in nature you will have trouble finding anyone who wants to stick around and who is also a good attorney.

As for salary, well it depends on what area you are in, but take a look at what law clerks or new prosecutors make. If you are not paying at least half again as much as those institutions then you will likely not retain your associate for long without job satisfaction and atmosphere being very high. For Maryland Prosecutors are paid for by the county with the median salary being around 55k a year. Law Clerks make around 45k a year. So a good price for a decent starting associate should be around 60 to 75k a year. If you are paying the same as say a law clerk or prosecutor's office you will find plenty of takers, but you won't hold onto the good ones.

I am personally very skeptical of nebulous promises of bonuses or potential increased money at some point down the road. I want to know upfront under what circumstances my pay would increase and how. This is from personal experience however, I was at a job that definitely burned me on bonuses and let me tell you. If you want to piss off an associate and make their work product lower further, just burn them on a bonus. The result is not an increase in productivity; it is an increase in the rate they will go looking for a new job.

And finally, if you have an attorney who is intelligent and good company but you are unhappy with their work performance, consider the very real possibility that you are a lousy manager and should take a hard look at how you are managing your associate. If they have never done a procedure before, have you not just told them what to do but also taught them? If they have done a procedure many times before but made a mistake, is that something that repeats? Or was it a onetime affair they learned from? Did they commit the mistake intentionally as part of bad strategy? If you are unhappy with how they are doing things, have you actually sat them down and explained to them why you are unhappy and explained what they need to do to fix it. Or did you simply say "stop doing X" and then left them scratching their head. Above all, do not be coy with your expectations. Set CLEAR and DEFINITE goals. If you have no goals then you will likely only notice when your associate does things wrong and will simply think of the successes as "just doing their job."

Good Luck,
Scott R. Apple

I ran this by my facebook world. The response from a restaurateur was "I paid my dishwasher more than that. What is wrong with people?"

Ari Hornick, California

You can't really pay a dishwasher much less than 24K without forcing him/her onto welfare. Lawyers are in a whole different category. We're talking new attorneys here, so they're almost guaranteed to have 6-figure student loans. If they could get only 24K, they ought to discharge their student loans in bankruptcy. (That was thought impossible until just recently when it started happening.)

Now, would you rather be the employer who forces her employees onto welfare or the employer who forces her employees into bankruptcy.

I think if you want to hire an attorney, you have to pay for one. I would just laugh if a client walked in the door and said "Hey, I'd love to hire you for \$12/hour." Why do attorneys think that other attorneys should be happy to work for an amount that they wouldn't even entertain? It sounds like you're just looking to take advantage of someone who might be so bad off that they'll take the deal.

An Hornick

In case this important fact got lost in our long thread, Dennis is NOT looking to hire an associate for \$24k. He posted his Craigslist ad for \$24k only as an experiment to see what the market would bear. He is not looking to take advantage of desperate attorneys.

Tracia Y. Lee

Well if your annual income is 24k, you are single, living by yourself and have let's say 120k in student loans, your monthly student loan payment should be \$85 (if you're on IBR). That's \$1020 a year in student loan payments. So I don't think you'll go bankrupt because of the student loans. But you'll be paying your student loans for a very long time (25 yrs). See <http://studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans/understand/plans/income-based/calculator>

Please note I'm not advocating for a 24k/yr salary. And I believe Dennis was only doing some market research.

Respectfully,
Yongmoon Kim, New Jersey

At least it's per hour worked. My first jobs (2010 grad, much worse market) were per hours billed and collected, i.e. no risk to the partner at all.

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Of course, when the client complained about the partner's billing (including billing for billing disputes), the only 'prudent' thing is to cut the associate hours and tell the client you'll be 'eating' those costs.

Nothing like having the first of the month be a guessing game as to whether you are going to be paid a dollar for the hours of work.

Ricky S. Shah, California

It's not about earning revenue to the firm, it's about creating value for the firm. Your secretary may never create an ounce of direct revenue for you but freeing time up creates value.

Ricky S. Shah

Income based repayment is only valid for federal student loans, it has nothing to do with private student loans. If you have 120k in student loans from law school, then half of them are private loans and they do not do things like deferrment or income based repayment. If they have 60k in private loans and they have adjusted their loans for a 30 year repayment (to reduce their monthly repayment) then they will be paying around 400 dollars a month. Then add your 84 a month from your federal loans and you have 484 in student loan payments each month.

You can sit down and calculate out expenses all you like, but bottom line is that you are paying an attorney for less then what they could get waiting tables at a moderately succesful resturant.

I have no doubt that you will find takers at virtually any price including free as I said before. The question is, will they be good attorneys, and will you retain them?

I would be interested to know if anyone who thinks that 24k or even 40k is a good salary for new attorneys have hired anyone in the last decade or so, and if so, were they both happy with the attorneys they hired at that price, and did they retain them for very long at that salary?

Scott R. Apple

Thanks for that Vicki.

The market here is very bad. And housing costs are very high.

About 2 years ago, a law firm advertised with a law school career office that they were looking for a full time entry level associate - they stated base salary and possibility of increases and % cut of matters brought in. The base would not have covered minimum wage if full time meant 40h/week. A legal paper picked this up and called the hiring partner for an investigative report type interview, and he essentially shrugged and repeated the ad in saying the firm had lots to offer... and that they had received lots of applications.

Now before you get all snobby on me, this is a good school we are talking about, albeit not Harvard Law.

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This does not take away from the other smart comments out there already. But if you simply want to play "how low can you go," apparently the answer is very low indeed...

Chiara LaPlume, Massachusetts

Again, I'm not saying an attorney should be paid 24k. But majority of law graduates have federal loans so there are affordable options, such as IBR.

Respectfully,
Yongmoon Kim

IBR is helpful. But at least in 2005 the max you could take out in Federal loans was 18,500 a year. That did not cover tuition at a lot of schools let alone living expenses. I know they raised it up recently, I think they are up to 20k? But it still does not cover all of the student loans. Unless you have a scholarship, you have private loans. I have friends who has 400k in student loans between law school and undergrad. Those are the worst. I have many more friends who have 200k in student loans just from law school. Folks who have 120k went to state school's and did not pay nearly as much in tuition.

Scott R. Apple

Some of the private loans now offer a deferment/forbearance option but it is NOT like the federal loans (MOHELA CASHloans have one). It also takes no proof (you just request it) to get it.

What was funny was I had been complaining to MOHELA for a couple of years now that my payment amount, for the supposed length of my loan, was way to high (I was paying almost as much on my car loan, which was at a higher interest rate and 1/3rd the years). I did the first deferment and when they recalculated my loan amounts to bring it out, my payment dropped by \$75

Erin M. Schmidt

A brand new single AF JAG in San Antonio makes \$29,530.02 for the first six months and then moves to \$65,968.80 a year including food and housing allowances

A brand new married AF JAG in San Antonio makes \$29,890.20 for the first six months and then moves to \$67,624.80 a year including food and housing allowances

Thank you

Maurleen Cobb, Texas

Stafford Loans go to \$20,500 with \$8500 subsidized. I believe Plus Grad loans will cover the maximum amount of attendance less what is covered by Stafford loans and any other financial aid. Both types of federal loans are eligible for IBR. I graduated last year with a little over \$100k in law school debt (and \$23k in undergrad loans) and I definitely am not paying the standard ten year plan on those loans.
Adam Kielich, Texas

I don't believe that \$24,000/yr is a good salary. \$40,000/yr is reasonable given the current market. With the current trend I will not be surprised if the reasonable salary for a new attorney is \$30,000/yr (adjusted for inflation) in 5 years. There is a huge supply of lawyers and not much demand. Seems like a recipe for a drop in salaries. It makes sense for attorneys to take a low paying job if they feel they are getting something else, such as valuable experience, then they can hang their own shingle. I was not as brave as many here. I did not want to go solo right out of law school. I new I wanted to be a solo, but I wanted experience with a law firm first. I suspect there are many that would rather have some experience first and then start their practice. If I title the position 'Legal Practice Residency' and offer a \$24,000 stipend for one year, is it more palatable?

Dennis Chen

With enrollments being down and probably insufficient to replace the number of attorneys that are going to be leaving the workforce due to age (not the age itself, but inability to continue practicing or retirement), I don't think there will continue to be an oversupply.

Lesley Hoenig

Have you seen any published statistics that support your position? Arithmetic suggests that the oversupply should solve itself at some point. Hopefully the problem will get better before it gets worse.

Mike Phillips, North Carolina

Here is the thing that needs to be clear, you can get attorneys responding to virtually any ad for a job that you put up. But to shamelessly ape an old saying you are looking for the following:

Cheap Associate
Good Associate
Associate Who Stays

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Pick any 2.

I am 100% confident that if you title a position legal practice residency, you will get people responding for 24k a year. I am also 100% confident that a good attorney will rapidly make friends once exposed to the local legal community and find a new job making 3 times as much within weeks or months but certainly not years of starting with you. If that is all you are looking for then by all means. But certainly any Associate worth their salt is going to want more. I do not know where in the world you are or what local attorney's in the public sector make there, but consider the following. The three things that keep good employees working (in any position) are Money, Job Satisfaction and Job Atmosphere. Public sector attorneys tend to have VERY high job satisfaction. So long as their office is not run by a total jerk, they also tend to have very high Job Atmosphere. They also tend to have low salaries. If you are offering money comparable to public sector attorney's then a good attorney will likely leave you either for a higher paying job elsewhere with similar Job Satisfaction and Job Atmosphere or a similar paying job in the public sector that has higher Job Satisfaction and Job Atmosphere.

Thus you need to offer more money than public sector to retain good attorneys. You can substitute job atmosphere and satisfaction with money, you can substitute money for higher amounts of satisfaction and atmosphere. You cannot have all three being lower than what your employee can get from the public sector or other jobs in the community and expect to retain that employee. This of course only applies to good attorneys. Bad attorney's you can retain a lot easier because they will want to stay with any source of income and will be unable to find a job that offers better.

Good luck,

Scott R. Apple

The annual borrowing limits you are speaking of are for Direct Stafford Loans. This borrowing limit does not apply to PLUS loans. And starting on July 1, 2006, graduate and professional students can borrow through the PLUS loan programs to fund their own education (hence Grad PLUS loans). And PLUS loans are federal loans, thus eligible for IBR. I'm not going into technical requirements for loan eligibility here.

By way of example, if you went to law school after 2006, and your tuition plus living expenses were calculated by your law school to be 60k per annum, your maximum borrowing that year could look like this (assuming your eligible for these loans):

Direct Stafford: \$20,500

Grad Plus: \$39,500.

And assuming law school tuition and living costs did not increase during your 3 years of law school, and assuming you borrowed the max mentioned above, and assuming you are eligible for these federal loans, your 3 year law school debt would be 180k.

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So you can be a law graduate with only federal student loans. And these loans would be eligible for IBR. And therefore if your salary was 24k/yr, you monthly payment would be \$85/month; which is affordable. Now there are missing variables here, such as undergraduate debt which I will not get into.

AGAIN, I am not saying young associates should be paid 24k.

Respectfully,
Yongmoon Kim

I've read about declines in enrollment. As far as when the older attorneys leave the workforce, I haven't seen anything specific, but, for example, in the town I'm in most attorneys seem to be over 50 (and many are social security age). I can count the number of attorneys younger than me on one hand. That seems to tell me that opportunities will be opening up when the older attorneys stop practicing. I know most attorneys around here (because they are all either solo, small firm other than the ones in the prosecutor's office) probably won't voluntarily retire, but the makeup of attorneys here is destined to change due to aging population.

Lesley Hoenig

Don't forget Federal Grants with repayment clauses like Pell Grants

Thank you

Maurleen Cobb

Ahhhh, I did not know about PLUS loans. I apologize, I didn't realize that such a thing exists now. If a PLUS loan is eligible for IBR, is it also possible that a PLUS loan is considered a private loan? A lot of my friends have private loans but some of them were in school after 2006, I don't know if they have PLUS loans or not, based on what they were telling me it didn't sound like they did.

Thank you for the correction.

Scott R. Apple

Grad PLUS loans are federally guaranteed loans borrowed from a bank/lender (e.g., SallieMae). People usually think it's a private loan since a bank/lender is involved but it is not. The best way to find out if you have PLUS loans is to look yourself up at https://www.nslds.ed.gov/nslds_SA/SaFinLoginPage.do.

Respectfully,
Yongmoon Kim

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Interesting article relevant to this thread re: the current job market for new law school grads:

<http://lawyerist.com/dont-go-law-school-now/>

Amy A. Long, Virginia

Only one post thus far has really pointed out what truly matters: the locale. \$24,000 may be adequate in Nome, Alaska, but \$40,000 would be close to subsistence living in Massachusetts (not just Boston).

\$24,000

- 7,000 taxes (next year's refund ain't helping you now!)
- 12,000 rent
- 1,200 gasoline
- 3,600 utilities

\$200 for food and clothing for the year, plus car insurance, excise taxes, medicine, etc.

Brian J. Hughes, Massachusetts

wow your utilities (and your rent!) are expensive, I average about \$250 a month for electric, gas, sewer and trash

and of course you would lower your tax bill by lowering your withholdings so you do not get a refund next tax season

Erin M. Schmidt

I'm going to guess \$24,000 won't get you far in Nome Alaska either since the cost of everything is higher there. Now \$24,000 here in middle of nowhere MI may be doable, without substantial student loans to pay off.

Lesley Hoenig

Nome, Alaska? I don't think so.

<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2013/09/06/16-breadsticks-the-high-cost-of-living-in-nome-alaska/>

I think you are thinking of somewhere less expensive, like a small town in the middle of the country.

Monica Elkinton, Alaska

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How funny, I was thinking wow that is a LOW estimate for rent!

Thank you

Maurleen Cobb

Actually, I am curious about the work product comment at big firm versus small. It's a topic I've been thinking about for a while - and I'm not sure how accurate it is. I have seen some incredible work product - particularly the writing - out of some large firms but I've also seen much that is just serviceable. I have also seen some very good work by solos and smalls but also some very very poor work. Overall I would certainly say that large firm work is more consistent across firms than is solo work product

But I am curious -- what makes you say that work by large firms is superior to solos? Would be helpful because I go up against large firms regularly

Carolyn Elefant

From what I've seen, big firms are generally better at hiding their poor reasoning and analysis. Their documents are generally not riddled with misspellings and poor grammar because there's some level of quality control.

Lisa Solomon, New York

I agree with Lisa. I don't usually see misspellings and poor grammar in BigLaw documents, but I have seen a lot of faulty analysis and citations to case law that do not support their positions, basically misstating or misrepresenting the law. Beating BigLaw can be done. I have done it twice this year. However, even though my research and analysis skills are better than BigLaw, I will never be paid like BigLaw or get the respect like BigLaw.

Tracia Y. Lee

I think you are ignoring scale. When litigating a matter with a \$100,000 legal budget, the depth of legal research and whole atmosphere of the case is something quite different from litigating a matter with a \$3,500 budget.

Does it mean that a person with a much smaller issue or smaller budget is not entitled to their day in court? It makes no sense for me to charge a client for 40 hours of work on a case where the amount at issue is \$10,000.00. You have to cut back on what you choose to do in that case. I am not saying that you do substandard work, but you do the requisite amount

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of work for the type of case. You will find that in county court there are some heavily litigated cases, primarily where there is a fee shifting provision and there are deep pockets on one side. PIP litigation is one of those areas. Collection defense also. The run of the mill county court case does not warrant a huge investment in legal fees, so there are issues that would be scrutinized in a large case but they are not explored in smaller cases.

I also disagree that attorneys have always been paid well.

Dennis Chen

I have seen my share of poorly drafted pleadings and briefs from large firms with misspellings and grammatical errors. There are no large firms in the town I'm in, so if there is an attorney from a large firm involved in a case, everyone knows they are from out of town. Chances are this puts the client at a disadvantage, because typical procedure here varies greatly from the Detroit area (which is usually where the big firm lawyers are going to be from though sometimes they come from Grand Rapids) and the out of town lawyer is proceeding as if things are exactly the same here as say Oakland County, and they aren't (for example, hearings are not scheduled on cattle calls, so always be prepared for a hearing at the scheduled time, and the judge will probably insist on not only negotiations before the hearing will be heard, but maybe even have an impromptu in house mediation session). Unless someone has been to this county before, they aren't going to know to advise their client of these things. And 40-50k is typical for an entry level prosecutor isn't it? Heck I've heard of prosecutors being paid even less than that.

Lesley Hoenig

"I also disagree that attorneys have always been paid well."

Agreed.

Examples from fiction include Puddin' Head Wilson (by Mark Twain), and everyone's favorite, Atticus Finch.

From real life (from 30+ years ago), I can tell you that people graduating from my college with a 5-year "Professional Masters" in Engineering had higher starting salaries at the time I graduated than did people who spent 7 years (in college and law school) becoming lawyers.

The big jump in starting salaries for lawyers came in the late '70s/early '80s (the precise date varied market-to-market) as the firms now known (collectively) as BigLaw began to open branch offices in cities far from their headquarters, and began paying wages all around the county that had previously been seen mostly in New York (and, to some degree, in D.C.).

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Interestingly, of course, salaries (even now) for lawyers (especially recent graduates) are peculiar. There is a very high going rate that is paid by BigLaw (with some variation city-to-city, but mostly pretty consistent in the top markets; last I heard this rate is still in the \$160K-\$175K range). Virtually no recent grads make more than this nominal going rate. Moving down, there is a huge gap, with relatively few recent grads making between (approx.) \$100,000 and this going rate. Below \$100,000, there are a wide variety of salaries paid. Curiously, however, the median salary of all law school grads is in the range of \$60K to \$70K. That means that there are an awful lot of new grads making less than \$60K to offset the elite folks making the going rate.

I don't know what that says about what we (as solos) should pay to hire a new lawyer, but it does mean that not all lawyers are currently or have in the past been "paid well."

Brian H. Cole, California

\$24,000 a year for a legal residency is higher than what I've seen. Not too long ago, a law firm was offering a legal residency for \$700 a month. That's only \$8,400 a year.

Onki Kwan

When I was hired for my first job as an attorney, I was paid less than I had been paid as a teacher, FWIW. And certainly, as a teacher, my student loans weren't as overwhelming when I finished law school. However, I was ready to begin teaching from the first day I started, in part due to practical classroom experience which was required for obtaining a degree in education. I'm not certain I was ready to practice law from my first day, despite a bit of practical experience. Apprenticeship would probably produce a higher quality of lawyer than the current system which forces newbies to earn as much as they can as quickly as they can to beat down student loans. i.e., they really aren't working at the level to justify the pay scale they need to survive for a couple of years - making their value much lower for at least, a small law firm. It's a difficult problem.

Vicki Levy Eskin

Left out "as" , first degree loan wasn't as overwhelming as law school loan. I'd paid the undergraduate and other graduate school as I went along, but couldn't do so with law school.

Vicki Levy Eskin

If you need money as a measure of your worth or as validation of your skills, you are distracted, at least.

I have been and still am willing to be employed for nothing or whatever is possible. I WORK, for the work, and to my own standards--no matter the compensation.

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As for attorneys always being well-paid: When I grew up, almost every attorney--including the heads of the larger firms in my town--did tax returns as a way to pay the bills.

I admit that was also a time when there was considerable controversy within firms when the young turks believed the roll-top desks should be retired, while the geezers feared the expense and the implications of change.

John Page

Here, here, John. I agree firmly with your position. Lord knows it's the rare year when I've been paid what I was worth and frankly, money has never been, nor will it ever be the reason I work, regardless of my personal wealth or lack thereof. I've been poor and I've been affluent. I worked constantly in both lifestyles and gave 100% to my employers regardless of the net pay. So I'm hacked off when I get less than 100% from anyone else, though I try to tell myself, "well, they're young, or well, they just don't get it, etc."

Vicki Levy Eskin

I agree...You either have a work ethic or you don't. More money won't magically create one...

Vonda K Vandaveer, Washington, DC

I agree with John and Vicki. People who are not working strictly for the money, and therefore focus most on the substance of the work, perform better than those who focus on the paycheck. The pay can be termed a great byproduct when it is not the primary goal. I love legal work and it is very rewarding in ways that have nothing to do with money.

Still, people who produce high quality work, especially highly substantive work, should be higher paid. That goes without saying, but I haven't seen one point made in this thread that I think is important. When evaluating what you should pay any worker - attorney, paralegal or secretary - you should ask yourself "what can I afford"? It doesn't mean you should decide on that basis alone. But if you find someone who is a great asset, you should assume the person will be resentful if he knows you can afford to pay a good amount more but prefer to pay bottom dollar by taking advantage of others' desperation for work.

The more of a "we're in this together" environment there is, the better any worker will feel about their pay. Anyone doing integral work that will help the firm increase in volume should be kept in mind for raises when revenue goes up. If workers know that is what they can expect, they're invested in the whole picture and willing to work hard for lower pay for some amount of

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time. The opposite is true. Workers who feel they are there to make someone else wealthy but are kept at lower pay, because the employer can do that given the current market, will feel used.

I think \$24,000.00 is too low no matter what the geographic location is and not only for attorneys but inexperienced paralegals and secretaries - if you can afford to pay more, and if you find someone who is dedicated and shows potential. If you can afford it, I think \$35,000 to \$40,000 is the lowest realistic amount you should offer for an inexperienced attorney, and the attorney should be evaluated for higher pay after a probationary period.

I have had the experience of being asked to work for less at times for firms that are new or relatively new. I have provided ground level work and been an integral part of growth and increased firm revenue. So, I speak from experience.

Donna R. Ireland, New Jersey (not a lawyer)

I agree with everything you've said Donna. And, FWIW, I start new attorneys at 40k, though I've seen frequently and quickly, that the new hire wouldn't bring in that amount in the first year, and each year want a raise (and generally receive it) without realizing that they were overpaid initially and that I'm still trying to turn a profit from their labors to offset cost to me. And most of them have been pretty aware at least the past few years, that we aren't always operating at a profit. But they want me to figure out how to cut other costs and pay them more. Often I've cut my own salary and have many times paid myself less than I'm paying the associate, because I feel sorry for him or her.

Vicki Levy Eskin

As a purveyor of fine young legal minds, I strongly agree with both Vicki and Donna.

Noah Davis, Washington

I gained the information I wanted from running the ad, and a nice bonus is that it sparked an interesting discussion on Solosez.

Regarding the low salary. New graduates with no experience, and no prospects, should be happy to take a position where they will get hands on, practical, transferable experience. Even if the position pays \$1,000/mo, take the job and get the experience. Get the opportunity to argue motions before a judge, depose witnesses, counsel clients. It's valuable experience that is more important than the money involved.

If the new attorney feels the employer is exploiting them, then they can leave as soon as an opportunity appears, but if they see the position as a win-win opportunity for both parties, then embrace it.

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When the new attorney goes looking for another job one year later, they will have law firm experience on their resume. I have received resumes from people that passed the bar in 2012 and have not found a legal job.

Some are unemployed, or chose not to list the non-legal job that they have. One year with no employment? How do they survive? One year in a small law firm and they should have the skills to start their own firm. I suspect that life in a mid-size to large law firm may insulate the new attorney from many of the day-to-day law firm practice issues.

An ideal setting I think is for a group of 3 - 5 solos that share an office space and split the cost of a shared new grad. That would provide an opportunity to work with different attorneys and possibly in different areas of the law. I guess that would be more along the lines of a legal practice residency.

I suspect there are some attorneys out there that have taken such an opportunity but they will not disclose the low salary to their peers.

Someone also mentioned that the next employer will want to know what they were paid in the prior job. Is that really relevant? The person interviewing does not have to know your prior salary.

Tina, the fee split you are referring to is not ideal for a new grad attorney that has no clue what they are doing. Most of them will not make much money.

Dennis Chen

Dennis, not to belabor this point, but ...

There are internships for people who are looking only for experience. The firm and the intern both know it's about what the intern gains by way of experience, and it's accepted by both. (Some firms, however, give interns a stipend, even student interns.) It should be clearly stated to your prospective candidates that you are offering low pay, expecting them to be happy because you are giving them experience, so they can make an informed choice and not have their hopes up.

\$1K a month is not win-win for someone who has to go home at the end of the day and put food on the table, no matter how much experience they gain. The promise of a future where one can expect to make more money than \$1K a month, which will raise them from dinner being a can of beans on the table to maybe hot dogs and beans some days, is not an opportunity in my opinion.

If you get someone for the low pay you have described, you should consider making it part time so they can pursue other opportunities at the same time. Again, there is that all important thing we all must do, which is eat.

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I don't mean to pick on you, but I have heard so often from people who answer ads on Craigslist that they are very discouraged because they do not get responses and keep sending out cover letters and resumes to anonymous people with no idea who is reading them. I know it's a way of testing the market sometimes. But my heart goes out to people who just want a chance (and to eat).

I am considering what to have for dinner tonight. Maybe that's why I mentioned so frequently in this post that people need to eat :o)

Donna R. Ireland, Not a Lawyer

To pay someone this pitiful amount ruins the profession. Period. If you can't afford to pay a decent salary, do the work yourself. If you don't have the time then you are not charging enough. Don't give me this crap about what the market will bear, we are members of a PROFESSION, we should be protecting it for ourselves and those that follow us.

Graham W. Kistler, New York

Chris, I am not surprised by your response. I am sure a lot of people feel that way. Unfortunately for the new grad attorneys with no job, no experience, there isn't much out there for them. I don't know what I would do if I was faced with that situation.

Dennis Chen

Honestly, in this area (rural Mid Michigan) \$24,000 is not out of the ordinary for a secretary. I think the going hourly rate is anywhere from 10-15/hour. That doesn't mean there aren't any that are paid better, but with a lower cost of living salaries are just lower on average here. (Now secretaries at the university will probably make closer to 40k, but even that is low compared to more populated areas).

Lesley Hoenig

The most beneficial thing that helped me with establishing a solo practice was sharing office space with my former officemate. I don't think the scenario is easy to come by, but I served as co-counsel for her collections matters (and anything else that required a court appearance), split the fees on those, AND she referred anything she didn't like doing to me. I got experience without being her employee, and only got paid when there was money to be paid (but at a higher hourly or contingency rate than someone

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with set salary would be getting, but it still was only a fraction of my total income) and had my own insurance and overhead expenses. I thought that worked out great because it instantly generated business, and I had someone to go to if I had questions on how to do something. Now, I don't think that is an easy situation to find, but even without a guaranteed income, I got great experience, and I would never have opted for a 24k/year job over that. Certainly before then, I had some very lean years. I like the idea of splitting a fee because if you don't get paid and payment of co-counsel is contingent on there being payment by the client (or in collections, by the debtor), then you don't have the problem of having to pay wages despite the lack of payment to yourself. Of course, it works best when everyone is paid.

Lesley Hoenig

The new grad with no job, no experience could always volunteer at a local nonprofit legal services organization to get experience. Most nonprofits could use the help since their funding and staff have been cut.

Respectfully,
Yongmoon Kim

Some of the people I have spoken with have said legal aid has very few internship opportunities available. One person said she could not get pro bono work in family law because she has no experience. I don't know how true that is.

Dennis Chen

We offer professional services. Now, mostly data processing. Examples of successful pro se actions are increasing accordingly. But that's not new. 'While back, down here in FL, a guy who was the town drunk--at least, a ne'r do well--name of Gideon, knocked the ball out of the park.

I have a friend who is a Sanitation Engineer (a PROFESSION). He has a motto on the wall SANITATION IS A WAY OF LIFE. I suggested it should be WE GET YOUR SH*T TOGETHER.

He suggested same could be motto for attorney.

Wonder which profession is more valuable to society?

John Page

I just spoke on a panel two days ago at UDC Law School with a managing attorney from DC Legal Aid. She said that they now have 10 one year unpaid positions, that tend to be funded by the law schools who will pay grads \$15/hour so that they can work somewhere for free. Even with unpaid positions, the managing attorney said that they receive dozens of resumes.

Carolyn Elefant

As a 3L, I've watched this thread with a fair amount of interest. And I'd like to offer my thoughts.

1. I wouldn't consider someone offering such a low amount to be serious. And I would remember that for future dealings with that attorney.
2. A student graduating law school with no experience has only themselves to blame. They could have spent their three years preparing to enter the field. Working for legal aid, the public defender, or any of the many state agencies or non profits providing legal services well get them experience, build a network, and expose them to areas they may not have considered. That is what I have done. And in a "down" market, I am choosing between decent jobs in my preferred practice area or going solo - well before the end of the first semester of my 3L year. And I am certainly not in the top of my class.

But, I'd view someone offering \$24k as a starting salary as someone planning to take advantage of people and that would affect my future dealings with that attorney.

I have never taken a job just for money. But, I would never take a job were my contribution is valued so poorly. You may be able to hire somebody that rate. But do you really want the person that would work for it.

Patrick Nolan, Not a Lawyer

I find the unpaid internships much more distasteful than a low paid job, but apparently, many people see it differently and favor unpaid internships. I know of attorneys in the area that provide unpaid internships for law students. I despise the free labor mentality. I would rather pay a student minimum wage for their time than have them work for free. Clearly I have a completely different view of this than many. That so many people would find a \$24,000/yr job offensive and then suggest that the law grads seek out an unpaid internship just boggles my mind. Some of the attorneys have the law students performing primarily clerical tasks but also allow them to attend hearings. If they are doing clerical work they should be paid.

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I think of the MD & pharmacy residencies. The MD finishes medical school then completes a low paid residency for 3 or more years then makes a much larger salary later. Pharmacists can easily make \$110,000/yr right out of school but if they want a clinical position, they will generally complete a residency that may pay \$40,000/yr then seek out a clinical position. They take the lower paid residency for the training provided. Why wouldn't a new grad take a low paid position for the training they will receive?

Rather than provide suggestions for how I should find an employee, because that was not the purpose of this thread. I do not need help there. I would like to know WHY people feel the way they do. What makes the unpaid internship more palatable than the low salary position?

Dennis Chen

Knowing both phamacists and doctors. My doctor friend was able to moonlight during his low paid residency. Enough to pay off his and some of his wife's medical school loans.
Pharmacy wise, if you want to teach, you have to do the residency for one year (40-50k) and it only takes 5 or 6 years of schooling (depending on your program) and the costs are much lower than law school

Erin Schmidt

I think unpaid internships will become a thing of the past. They arguably run afoul of minimum wage laws (FLSA). Some entertainment/publishing companies are finding that out the hard way. This is a big issue percolating in the S.D.N.Y., and will be making its way up to the Second Circuit. I think there are reasonable arguments on both sides of the issue, but ultimately, having someone work for something less than minimum wage-even if they agree to it-is incompatible with the FLSA. I wrote an article on the subject that will be in the December edition of the Illinois Bar Journal. In sum, law firms large and small should be wary of using unpaid interns.

Christopher Keleher, Illinois

Well I personally disagree with members of the bar seeking unpaid internships from recent grads or attorneys UNLESS it's really an internship-meaning there should be a focus on proving the unpaid intern training and practical experience. Why? Because you are gaining a profit on someone else's free labor.

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Of course, in exchange for gaining the on-the-job training, the intern should provide at least something in value-maybe some clerical work, valuable research, brief writing etc. Call it a fair trade, a balanced exchange.

But what I continuously find, or rather hear (anecdotally of course, and I can be wrong because I've never personally experienced it) is that people misuse internships as free labor. And I believe there's something wrong with that. If you need clerical support, then go hire someone willing to work for whatever you are paying. If you can't afford it then work more hours doing the clerical work yourself or improve your business plan so you can afford to hire. But don't categorize it as an "unpaid internship" and just have the poor law grad/attorney just making copies, answering calls, getting coffee, or proof reading letters for you without giving something in exchange. At least teach them how to draft a pleading, motion, something.

Respectfully,

Yongmoon Kim

Christopher, I was shocked to find out that the unpaid internship with the promise of a paid position "at some point" seems to be common practice in NYC, having had somebody I know go through this, who found the process very competitive. I believe the definition of an internship for a for-profit company includes that it needs to be a drain of resources on the company - that is not what I am observing law firms interns doing. Of course my 'n' is small, and I could be off base. But I have seen enough flagrant violations of the wage statute done by law firms to believe it.

I have to agree that a low-pay associate position would seem preferable to an unpaid internship. With the possible exception that with an unpaid internship you are presumed to have flexibility with your internship schedule to fit in a paying job or interviewing.

I think that there is a perception that if you are unable to secure a legal position within a certain amount of time after law school graduation, you may become unemployable as an associate attorney, and be driven out of the profession altogether. I am not sure that this perception is entirely wrong.

I also believe that most nonprofits require you to carry your own malpractice insurance in order to do volunteer legal work for the nonprofit. That was certainly the case when I graduated from law school.

In other words, this is very complex. You might find a very good associate at a very low pay, however realistically you cannot expect them to stay.

Chiara LaPlume

I posted some comments about internships. My comments related to the fact that with an internship it is very clear between the firm and the intern that the arrangement is based on the firm providing experience and the intern working for free to gain it. In your scenarios, it would bother me to think you would hire someone for very low pay and not make your position as clear to them as you have made it to us. It seems that you are not interested in someone who will grow with you. Rather, you are fine with someone spending a year and leaving for greener pastures after benefitting from the experience you gave them. Just as interns know what they are signing on for, I think whoever you interview should be told exactly what you envision. Otherwise, they are not making an informed choice.

I don't believe the government should get involved and prohibit unpaid internships, although an internship should be defined with clear parameters (such as how long free labor can be classified as an internship). Internships have been of value in many professions. There are positive outcomes. But, personally, I will always say that if the firm can afford (an amount) and the person is an asset - pay them! If it's truly an internship limited as to time, and the firm can afford it - pay a stipend!

Donna R. Ireland, Not a Lawyer

Just saw a posting for a java programmer (about a six month course) with no experience necessary starting at 75k + benefits...

Roman R. Fichman

When I graduated law school in 2007, I couldn't find a job, so I volunteered at legal aid for 5 months. There I met my mentor who helped me open a solo practice. The first year, I made enough to pay myself \$1,500. By the end of year 4, I was paying myself around \$35,000. I was then hired by a small firm with no guaranteed base salary, but guaranteed volume where I get a percentage of the cases I handle. Would I have considered a position that paid \$24,000? Absolutely. A salary is only ridiculously low if there are no legitimate candidates willing to accept it. Otherwise, it is a indication of where the job market is.

I don't buy the argument that offering lower salaries harms the profession. If someone is offering \$24,000 a year because they can't afford to offer more, I think it is better than that is fine. Suggesting that the potential employer should wait till they can offer more does nothing to help either the employer, the otherwise unemployed new lawyer, or the profession as whole. As much as I would like to believe that a hallmark of this honorable profession should be that we all make good money, I think

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how much we make is less important than the work we do, and the standards by which we do it.

A \$24,000 job pays a new attorney infinitely more than being unemployed and inexperienced, and makes a great stepping stone to a better paying job, or a better salary if the employee begins to bring in their own clients. I know a lot of people would suggest that the person start their own firm rather than accepting such a low salary, but I can't imagine most solos earned \$24,000 out of the gate.

Brian C. Hagner, Wisconsin

I have been watching this thread, but without commenting. That was the perfect answer.

Lewis Roberts

I don't have a whole lot to add to what has already said, other than:

1. I think a lot of the people who've had the most negative reactions to the salary in the ad live in places with much higher costs of living than central Florida. If you live in NY, New England, DC, SoCal...think at least 50-100% higher is the equivalent. Really.

2. Dennis said, from the outset, that he did this primarily as an experiment, to see what type of responses he got. He didn't say he was only going to hire someone for \$24K.

3. I can see value to many in taking this position, if it provides something to help build a career. That is what I think a lot of people are missing. There are some job opportunities that pay well but are dead end. There are others that pay miserably but help build skills and contacts that will be useful the rest of your career. This is why I took a 75% pay cut in law school to work for a judge. Putting in an application doesn't mean you'll take the job, but many of us would rather throw our hats in the ring to find out more than just dismiss it based on salary alone. Unless you are making more than \$24K, I don't see why not.

Cynthia V. Hall, Florida

I hired an associated at \$40k, no experience. She indicated that she had, amongst other things, dependency experience. I sent her to cover a very simple dependency hearing, but requested that she speak with opposing counsel about a separate matter before the hearing. I asked her to call me when she left the courthouse, which she did. When I expressed surprise that she'd finished the hearing so quickly, she replied, "Hearing??" She spoke with the other attorney, but forgot or didn't know to attend the hearing.

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So, I was frustrated, but thought I'd give her another chance. I asked her to find a process server to serve two individuals on specific court dates and directed her to the documents which I'd already prepared and saved in our database to be served. Got the affidavit back from the process server. She'd sent the Summons, but no Complaint. Sigh. Needless to say, the people I was trying to serve made it even more difficult to be found after they were on notice that I was looking for them. I was patient a few more months, but finally gave up and let her go, as it appeared that common sense wasn't in her job description.

I won't be starting anyone else at that figure. I'm not wild about hourly either, as I've had associates grossly take advantage of that and do personal work on my time, or simply piddle around.

I know there are good associates out there, but I've definitely had some unique experiences and "next time" want to make sure that whoever I hire is well worth what I pay them. After all, with learning curve, benefits, etc., taking on an associate is a massive undertaking and it take a good deal of time to actually make enough to cover their work, sigh.

Vicki Levy Eskin

I serve on the Connecticut bar association's task force on the future of legal education and standards of admission. This thread is so helpful. When one cares about training and mentoring an associate one on one the commitment is tremendous in terms of time and money.

Thank you,

Anthony R. Minchella, Connecticut

The nature of your practice will largely determine whether to hire an associate. If you are selling yourself as the Wizard of Oz, you will have difficulty implementing an associate for the simple reason, your clients will only want to talk to you.

If you have a practice where aspects of your practice do not have a lot of interface with clients OR it is institutional work (collections and insurance defense come to mind), you have a better shot at successfully integrating and associate.

All that being said, a lazy, shiftless, un-coachable, entitled, never-had-to-roll-up-their-sleeves, I went to law school because (1) it seemed like a good idea; (2) my parent did it; (3) I couldn't get a real job out of college, bump on a log, clock watching, person isn't going to work under any scenario.

When I graduated in 1998, my first job was \$350.00 a week, health benefits and 50% of what I originated in fee. Having been straight commission my whole life (Cutco knives, answering service tied to a pager & mortgages), I saw opportunity.

My second job (2001) had a higher base, discretionary bonus based on productivity of the firm and no "fee split" got me close to \$45k. I broke my ass and got paid.

Motivated help is *hard* to find.

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My 0.02

Michael J. Sweeney, Connecticut

I know of quite a few young attorneys (and some not so young) who lack common sense, work ethic, and/or simple knowledge of grammar. These are not things you need to learn in law school; you should already have them. The attorneys who hire me have these same complaints about associates they have hired and fired. I have read pleadings and motions written by their former associates with a lot of typos and grammar mistakes. I even found sentences where the key word "not" was missing. It's awful. I don't know where these former associates went after being terminated, but I would hate to think that they are hanging out their own shingles, representing real people without any supervision. That is scary.

Tracia Y. Lee

I see that in opposing counsel sometimes.

Dennis Chen

Dennis, I agree.

After 14 years of practice, I know that good help is hard to find, at any price.

Tracia Y. Lee
