

Соловей М. В. - студент 1-го курсу
факультету № 2 Національної академії
внутрішніх справ;
Консультант з англійської мови:
Зубенко В. О. - викладач кафедри
гуманітарних та загально-правових
дисциплін Національної академії
внутрішніх справ

PLANNING FOR A LEGAL CAREER OVERSEAS

If one of your career or personal goals is to work as a U.S. lawyer overseas, you need to start preparing and positioning yourself very early on. Not all firms allow or encourage their associates to work overseas, even if they have overseas offices. Some overseas offices are staffed exclusively with local lawyers. Do not rely on the firm's promotional materials targeted to potential clients when determining the strength of the firm's international platform and possibilities for working in a foreign office. You need to dig a little deeper and ask around.

As a general rule, prestige does matter. The majority of firms with overseas offices (and moreover, overseas offices that actually employ U.S. associates) are the top international firms overall. These are usually the firms with the greatest share of cross-border work. And in a foreign city where only the very top U.S. firms have any name recognition, prestige will carry extra weight.

How important are language skills?

For certain overseas opportunities, you must be fluent in a foreign language; for other opportunities, proficiency may suffice or no language skills may be required.

Europe: If you want to move to London, English may suffice, though knowledge of another European language (especially French or Russian) will be a big plus. For corporate work in other European capitals, fluency or a very solid proficiency in the native language is essential. For international arbitration work, the language skills are not as necessary (unless the group is bringing you on for a specific matter), but you will be much happier if you have enough of the local language to get by in the office and in the new city in general. You will also be expected to take the local bar exam if you want to stay long-term, and that will require fluency.

Latin America: Expect any opening to require fluent Spanish or Portuguese.

Middle East: Arabic is of course a big plus, but generally foreign language skills are not required.

Asia: English will suffice for Singapore, but Mandarin is required for almost all job openings in Mainland China and even in Hong Kong. Korean is required for Seoul, and/or sometimes Mandarin if Chinese work is done out of the Seoul office.

Caveats work abroad as a U. S. lawyer.

There are pros and cons to work overseas. Generally, the overseas offices are smaller offices and hence there may not be as developed training and other mentoring structures as in the larger home office. They may have fewer support staff and you may not have that junior associate to delegate work to anymore!

Smaller offices may have a smaller variety of work, and certainly the work for U.S. associates may be less diverse. It is easy to get pigeonholed and not gain the same level of experience and professional development that you would gain in the U.S.

What should I be done for the best position myself for going overseas?

There are several things you should start doing early on if your goal is to make it overseas as a U.S. lawyer.

First, get the right experience. It is extremely hard to rebrand yourself and switch practice areas once you have started your legal career. But if you are going to try to make a switch, it is usually much easier to move practice areas within your own firm than to find someone willing to hire you as a lateral associate into a new practice area. Remember, the lateral market is not the same as the market for summer or first year associates. Being smart, interesting and personable is no longer good enough. You will only be hired if you have the right skills and experience.

Keep the timing in mind. You should give yourself a solid year or preferably two of training in the U.S. before you go overseas, but you also do not want to head overseas too late in your career. If you need a visa to work overseas, factor in that this process could add a few months to the timeline.

Tell your firm early on about your interest in potentially going overseas. Put yourself on the appropriate partner's radar.

Brush up on your language skills if they will be relevant. Be prepared for interviews in the local language of the new office.

Finally, remember that recruiters can be a great source of information on firms, the latest regional trends and requirements for working overseas. Any good recruiter will be happy to share their knowledge even if you are not looking to move firms imminently. But be sure to do your research. Work with a recruiter who knows the particular market you are interested in, or who works in conjunction with a colleague or team of colleagues who know that particular market.