

Navigating Your Future: Which Flavor Will You Choose?

Career Development



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Recently, a post on LinkedIn about whether you should take a job in a management consultancy firm or in a startup after graduation from university made me think what I would have done differently if I could go back in time. In the legal world, the question would be rephrased as whether you should join a law firm or get a junior in-house role when you are a fresh graduate.

In my experience, I worked as a summer intern in Big Law firms when I was studying, and there were not many in-house roles at that time. But nowadays, many companies have legal and compliance departments where there are plenty of opportunities, including for new graduates. So, younger readers may have more choices and decisions to make in the beginning of their career. Having worked in a law firm and then moved to in-house, let me share pros and cons of each option.

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Starting in a law firm

Working in a law firm right after graduation allows you to learn different industries and areas of law. One day, you work on a new employee handbook for a client, another day you find yourself talking to

regulatory authorities about gray areas in energy sector. You jump from one matter to another, as if you get a little taste from various flavors of ice cream.

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Sometimes, you give the advice and you do not hear back from the client, leaving you wondering about the outcome. You meet many people and you network in a higher speed compared to working in an in-house role. You also have the chance to work with various lawyers in the law firm, a constant learning opportunity both in terms of legal work but also managing different profiles. Brainstorming and diving into the deepest unchartered waters — or maybe I should say non-regulated areas — where you need to innovate and guide your clients can be very rewarding.

While nowadays there is more emphasis on work-life integration, I still observe law firm lawyers who take secret pride when they work long hours. The path to partnership can be clearer, although expectations on billable hours and bringing new clients are not easy.

Starting in a legal department

As a young graduate, you will have a legal head running the department and explaining the company, stakeholders, industry, and competition. You will have to understand the value chain and business to be able to advise. The beauty of working in-house is diving deep into industry details and accumulating commercial and regulatory understanding.

On the other hand, there will be more administrative work: Who will help with the slides? Who will set up the meeting with external lawyers? As the junior in the department, these tasks may appear daunting (or boring). Without the pressure of billable hours, the work-life integration may be better unless the performance evaluation targets hang over your head like the sword of Damocles. And the path to chief legal officer is often blurry, depending on who has a better opportunity inside or outside of the company to promotion or the company's potential reorganization. That is to say: It's not necessarily about your performance.

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Know yourself: Motivations and preferred environment

To those who are about to make the decision, I recommend choosing the most difficult path. "Know yourself." This is very hard because you are still young and ready to discover the world and yourself. But you can start by asking simple questions: What motivates you (getting more challenging work, new stuff, money)? And what kind of working environment lets you thrive (competitive, international, etc.)?



Discover your true path by asking yourself questions to better understand yourself. Andrii Yalanskyi / *Shutterstock.com*

No, I am not going to ask you where you see yourself in five years. That is not realistic. Instead, I would like to ask: When you dream about work, what are you doing? Are you happy?

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Last but not least, don’t forget that careers aren’t always linear. You can start in one place and take a roundabout, while enjoying different flavors of ice cream. And who knows? You can also make your own unique flavor.

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definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

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