

The Top 5 In-House FAQs:

Over the past few years, we have found that associates have been looking to move in-house earlier and earlier in their careers. We constantly get calls from associates who are asking very similar questions or who say: "if you hear of a good in-house opportunity, please call me." Though each situation is different, below are the most frequently asked questions we get from associates wanting to move in-house.

When in my career should I move in-house?

Although there is a no "ideal" time to make a transition from private practice to in-house positions, we generally recommend that associates build a good base set of legal skills before making the move. We find that most associates hit a good base level with their legal skills between 3-5 years post call. Generally, in-house departments are not looking for lawyers they need to train but rather those that can bring already existing useful legal skills to their departments.

How do I best prepare for moving in-house?

Gaining exposure to and experience with a wide variety of corporate/commercial transactions is the best training for going in-house. In Alberta, obtaining corporate experience within the context of the oil and gas industry is particularly helpful. Litigators and other specialists (like tax) probably have the hardest time making this transition as most in-house departments continue to refer such work to external counsel. If you specialize in litigation or tax (or other such specialty) your best chance to obtain an in-house position is to target large in-house departments.

How does compensation compare between private practice and in-house positions?

Most large law firms have similar compensation structures

for their associates. In comparison, in-house compensation can vary widely depending on the size of the company, the size of the legal department, the importance the law department receives within the company, etc. Generally speaking, base salaries are lower in-house but are often offset by bonuses, long-term incentive programs, stock-option plans, RRSP contributions, flex days, and great benefit plans.



Is there a better work-life balance with in-house positions? Generally, the notion that moving in-house will offer a great work-life balance or extreme flexibility is a bit of a myth. What in-house positions do offer is greater control and predictability over your work flow. This allows in-house lawyers to be more insulated from last-minute vacation or weekend wrecking deals. It is important to keep in mind that most in-house lawyers work just as hard as their private practice colleagues.

What is the best way to find an in-house job?

Actively networking in the business community and working with a legal recruiter are the two best ways to making a move into an in-house position. Many companies rely on recruiters to help them find great lawyers. The HR departments in many large organizations recognize that they may not have the same reach or the same ability to determine who the best candidates are and hence rely on our expertise to help in their hiring process.

For more than 25 years, The Counsel Network has provided the Canadian legal market with comprehensive talent management services.