

## Publications

### From Gov't To Firm, Happily: Changing Careers Midstream

#### Related Professionals

David M. Edelstein

#### Related Services

Environmental

**AUTHORED ARTICLE** | 4.21.2016

*Law360*

David Edelstein, an associate in the Vorys Cincinnati office and member of the environmental group, authored an article for *Environmental Law360* titled "From Gov't To Firm, Happily: Changing Careers Midstream."

The full text of the article is included below.

--

### From Gov't To Firm, Happily: Changing Careers Midstream

Before making the transition to private practice, I'd been a government attorney at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for nearly a decade. I enjoyed my job and being in a leadership position, but even though I found our work satisfying and my colleagues diligent, I soon realized that my career was at a standstill. In the federal government, I wouldn't be able to take the next step in the career process for 10 or 15 years.

Starting a job search when you work in the federal government is different from the way you'd approach it in the private sector. Everything has to be totally aboveboard to avoid the appearance of impropriety. You should notify ethics that you're looking for new employment — a notification that's best made in a face-to-face meeting with the agency's ethics counsel. It's also a good idea to further secure administrative approval before accepting anything, be it: an interview, lunch, dinner or a flight to a different city to meet with a firm. And be sure to work closely with ethics when providing information for conflicts checks that private firms require.

The next step is to find a recruiter — since I hadn't interviewed for a job outside of the EPA in nearly a decade, I needed help. Get to know your recruiter well, and make it your business to work for him, to take his advice and let him point you in the right direction. He can help you

rework your resume and cover letter from scratch, prepare for interviews, and even discuss which firms will most value your skills.

Throughout the interview process, be forthright and honest about your values, weaknesses and strengths. I used the interviews as an opportunity to learn about the firm and its culture, not just answer questions. I knew I found a good fit after I interviewed with the Cincinnati team at Vorys. The rest is history.

As I walked into the lobby on my first day, I knew I was beginning a whole new career, with new challenges and new opportunities. And I loved it.

What I learned in my job search and transition not only applies to attorneys considering a jump from government work to private practice, but also to anyone considering a midstream career change.

Here are the top takeaways that I had from this experience:

- **Know yourself:** Are you comfortable playing catch-up, asking questions and not having all the answers? Would you be willing to move from a leadership role to one in which you're answering to your colleagues?
- **Be patient:** Switching careers is not often a fast process and moving from the government into private practice will take some time. Be patient with the administrative personnel from the government's side — there are very few people in human resources doing a lot of work. Similarly, be patient starting your next career. You're going to have a lot to learn coming into private practice — don't expect to learn it all at once.
- **Include your family in your career decisions:** You might have a one-company career or you might change jobs many times, but your family will always be with you. Keep them, especially your spouse, in the loop during all the phases of your career transition. Never lose sight of the fact that while transition is stressful for you, it's always going to be stressful on the ones you love. Use each other for support — look at the transition as another of life's adventures.
- **Find the right recruiter:** A recruiter should be an expert in the field, but also someone you trust implicitly. Remember that you work for your recruiter. Take the time to get to know your recruiter on a personal level. The more your recruiter knows about you, the better understanding he or she will have as to what private law firms would be a good fit for you.
- **Get in where you fit in; don't fit in where you get in:** Find a company culture that meshes with your personality. Be honest about your values and what you are looking for when you interview. Don't try to change who you are to force a match that isn't there. Not every conversation has to be "strictly business." Your soon-to-be colleagues will be interested in your life, and you should be interested in theirs. You will spend a lot of time together — it's OK to get to know one another both personally and professionally.
- **Leave your ego at the door:** Be humble without losing sight of your own value. Hubris will be your ultimate stumbling block. No matter how great you were at your previous position, you are going to have a lot of new things to learn. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know — but, I'll go look that up for you."

- **Weigh the pros and cons of starting a new job search:** Take the time to study what you would want your next job to be. If you are unsure, consider pro bono and other volunteer opportunities in your fields of interest. Even if you are an experienced attorney, look for a mentor. Attorneys experienced in their craft are almost always willing to sit down and share their thoughts and experiences. This is a tremendous way to answer many of the questions you may have and evaluate pros and cons.
- **Make sure the transition from your old job to your new job is a smooth one:** Don't burn bridges — you never know what the future may hold. In fact, having colleagues you can contact in the government can be a huge benefit to a private firm.
- **Considerations on relocation:** If you are open to relocation, study what you will need to do for a smooth transition. Relocation adds an entirely new layer of necessary communications with your spouse. No one likes moving and all the stresses that come with it. Be sure you are prepared to handle the stressors of relocation if that is your choice.