

Law Firm Attorney Roles: Are You a Finder, Minder, Binder or Grinder?



Does your legal career give you the fulfillment and satisfaction you want? The answer for many attorneys is no, according to a [study published in The Washington Post](#). The unhappy attorney is a common sentiment. Do law firm roles have something to do with the ranking?

Why Are Lawyers Unhappy?

The unsatisfying answer is, *it depends*.

A whopping 56% of lawyers are frustrated with their job, according to [studies noted in Above the Law](#). There are lots of reasons but there's something lurking at the bottom of each of the many problems listed, can you see it?

It's purpose.

The hidden assumption that's made is this: There's something wrong with the job. The experience isn't quite what many attorneys imagined coming in.

What if it isn't the job?

What if your job would be instantly more enjoyable with a simple switch? A change in your role or function that's designed to align with who you are?

There are a few different roles for attorneys within a law firm: **finders**, **binders**, **minders**, and **grinders**. These roles have a significant impact on the progress of your career, but they also have a [significant impact on your firm's performance](#). Let's dive into them.

Why Law Firm Roles Should Align with Personality

It shapes your income.

The [research](#) on this is clear. When an employee's personality traits match the traits that are ideal for their job, they [earn more](#). When there's a personality/jobs mismatch, motivation and job performance suffers.

Whether you're [hiring for a role](#) or [actively looking for one](#), make sure the candidate traits match with the position for the best hiring results.

[Personality-job fit theory](#) states that your employee's personality traits (i.e. the [big five personality traits](#)) determine their adaptability within your firm. This impacts your firm's performance significantly, either positively or negatively over time.

Additionally, this has a large impact on individual attorneys. Many attorneys aren't fulfilling the roles that best match their personality. Firms are struggling with a widespread problem.

A role mismatch.

Attorneys generally fall into four distinct roles.

Finders: The Recruiters

Finders are rainmakers. They bring new clients, business and revenue to a firm. Good finders are exceptionally rare which makes them incredibly valuable to a firm. When times are good, finders often make more. When times are bad, finders often make dramatically less money than their peers.

Binders: The Connectors

These attorneys are sophisticated networkers, able to connect with, build and maintain deep relationships with important and powerful people. They receive and provide others with important introductions.

Minders: The Managers

Minders are bureaucrats. Oftentimes they're on executive committees or they're the managing partner responsible for administrative tasks. They manage attorneys, paralegals and support teams. In short, they run law firms. They're efficient, precise and capable of managing a firm.

Grinders: The Workhorses

The majority of attorneys are hired to do one thing: work on the matters given to them. These attorneys are expected to **(a.)** do as much (billable) work as possible **(b.)** produce high-quality work as quickly as possible. Grinders aren't hired to be mentors, rainmakers or managers. They're workhorses, the ones with their sights set on goals and how to accomplish them quickly.

With these roles in mind, attorney/firm dissatisfaction often comes from a confusion about an attorney's expected role.

- New associates (10 years of experience or less) are often hired to be *grinders*; to complete the massive amount of work a firm needs done. However, these young attorneys want to make an impact as a finder, binder or minder. Naturally, they're dissatisfied.
- An attorney is made partner with the implicit and unspoken expectation that he behaves as a *finder*. His firm expects him to bring in a significant amount of new business for the firm. However, this newly minted partner has the mindset of a *grinder*. He put his head to the grindstone and worked hard, but gets unexpectedly replaced due to poor performance.
- A young associate has been working hard for the last three years. She works 12- to 14-hour days, rarely sees her family and is in the office seven days a week. She's struggling with burn out, depression and severe job dissatisfaction. She's questioning whether she'd like to be an attorney at all anymore.
- A managing partner job is to function as a *finder*, to bring in new business. She's also expected to produce a large volume of billable work for the firm. She's on several committees, handles a variety of administrative and

business development tasks but is not compensated for these “extras.” She has been hired to be a minder but is expected to be a *finder* **and** a *grinder*.

The firm and its employees have conflicting expectations. The job isn’t *necessarily* the problem (though it still could be).

Expectations are the problem.

How Law Firm Roles Could Solve a Widespread Problem

It’s easy enough to suggest that attorneys pursue the roles they desire, but is that impossible if you’re never selected for that role?

Not so much.

You’re in control. You can choose your role, even when placed in a less than desirable role.

How do you choose the role you want when you’re placed in the wrong role? There are lots of ways to go about this.

You can:

- Produce exceptional results for the role you want *and* the role you have. If you’re hired to be a grinder but you’d like to be a binder, start acting like one. Excel as a grinder, but find a safe avenue that enables you to build a strong reputation as a binder.
- Get some experience as a binder then, find an organization that will hire you as a binder.
- If they’re open to it, negotiate with firm management for a role change. Quantify the value you’ve provided to the firm as a binder, using metrics that matter to firm leadership (e.g. *revenue saved, client relationships preserved, matters won, etc.*). Do it with several alternate options lined up in case your firm rejects your proposal.
- Pursue your desired role in an alternate capacity (e.g. freelance, starting a new business or firm, etc.)

It isn’t easy and it certainly isn’t simple. But it is *doable*. It’s something you can use to establish yourself in the role that you want. And it’s dependent on one simple concept.

Add value.

Not only in your current role, but add more value in the role you'd like to transition to. Some firms (e.g. BigLaw) aren't flexible in this area so you may have to make a decision. This makes negotiation with firms (yours or another) a straightforward and quantifiable process.

Your Law Firm Role Should Align with Your Personality

It *can* align with your personality.

The research is clear. When an employee's personality traits match their law firm role, everybody wins. Employees earn more money, firms get outstanding results and performance skyrockets.

Who are you?

Most attorneys don't know. Most *firms* don't know. You're part of an exclusive minority. You understand the roles, the roles as they exist in your firm. You have the information you need to eliminate a major slice of career unhappiness.

Once again, it *isn't* easy and it isn't simple, but it *can* be done. Especially if it means you come home happy.

Identify your current role. Identify your future role, the law firm role that you want. With a clear idea of your current situation and a solid plan to follow, career happiness is right at your fingertips.

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