

# ABOVE THE LAW

## The Great Escape: Lawyers Are ‘The Hidden Talent Pool’ In Plain Sight For Nonlegal Roles

It's somewhat surprising that Corporate America is not actively seeking lawyers for non-practicing roles.

By [Neil Handwerker and Kimberly Fine](#) on February 25, 2025 2:33 pm

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*Ed. note: This is the second in a series of articles by our friends Neil Handwerker and Kimberly Fine of [ex judicata](#), who will be writing about lawyers interested in transitioning to nonlegal careers.*

**What is the big idea?**

We have now reached 100,000 unique users on exjudicata.com. A testament to the rapidly growing number of lawyers and law students interested in, if not transitioning to nonlegal careers right away, at least exploring what alternatives are open to them besides practicing law. Which leads to an idea so big it is hard to conceptualize.

**What kind of career alternatives are available to lawyers and law students? Everything.** Save those occupations requiring specific schooling and credentialing. For example: brain surgeon, CPA, licensed plumber.

Last year, ex judicata had the pleasure of interviewing Patty Roberts, the Dean of St. Mary's Law School. For those unfamiliar, Dean Roberts is one of the most innovative legal educators in America. Her law school is at the forefront of making a legal education available to underrepresented communities. Though having a live curriculum, St. Mary's was also the first law school in the nation to make available a fully remote JD program accredited by the ABA. Dean Roberts told ex judicata:

*"The question is not what can you do with a law degree, it is what can't you do with a law degree."*

And readers of this column will know that last month we quoted Kellye Testy, CEO of the American Association of Law Schools, who is broadcasting this message loud and clear.

"A JD is a degree in complex problem-solving. And if there is one thing every business needs more of, it is complex problem-solvers."

Anecdotally, most know it is not unusual to see in the biography of a successful business executive that they are also lawyers by training.

So, if lawyers can do most everything, why is it so, so difficult to leave law and find a nonlegal career leveraging the JD skill set which includes analytical thinking, ability to manage huge amounts of data, speaking/writing and presenting persuasively, issue spotting, problem-solving, etc.?

### **No defined paths.**

If you ask 100 lawyers now in successful business careers how they got there, you may well get 100 different answers. So, it is not as if a lawyer wakes up and decides to leave a law firm to become, say, a talent agent and here is where and how to apply.

Substitute pretty much any nonlegal occupation. Even careers that are deemed to be close to the practice of law like investment banking or risk management. There are no set pathways.

### **Corporate America not focused on hiring JDs for nonlegal jobs**

The day ex judicata launched as a company, we were present with a tradeshow booth at SHRM's annual convention. For the uninitiated, this is the Society for Human Resource Management. About 25,000 hiring authorities descended on Las Vegas. We figured we would go to the belly of the beast.

What better place to take our message which we distilled down to hire JDs because they are:

### “The Hidden Talent Pool” in plain sight



**Signage at Ex Judicata’s tradeshow booth at SHRM annual convention** (heads not actual employees of ex judicata)

In addition to manning the booth, we also tirelessly networked with sponsors, speakers and attendees. In talking about placing lawyers in *nonlegal* jobs, we may as well have been talking about recruiting people from Atlantis. There was very little understanding of what we were saying. There was some recognition of lawyers being hired for jobs in compliance. Compliance has been a harbor for non-practicing JDs for some time.

As many of you may know, certain employers, like the Big 4 accounting firms and management consulting firms, have been hiring lawyers for nonlegal jobs for decades. For many kinds of jobs. Yet even here, the roles are not marked. It’s not the case where, say, a Big 4 firm places an ad on a job board for an investigative services role and it is marketed to JDs. We wish that were the case because we want these kinds of positions posted on ex judicata’s job board. The only one where all the opportunities are nonlegal jobs for lawyers.

It’s somewhat surprising that Corporate America is not actively seeking lawyers for non-practicing roles in that more than 70 of the *Fortune 500* Chief Human Resources Officers have law degrees, and that the senior ranks of HR departments of many large companies have lawyers in nonpracticing roles. If they don’t know how versatile that a law degree is, who does?

**If all else fails, audit!**

We hope to be able to get a Fortune 500 company, or two, to audit their workforce to see how many employees hold JD degrees *outside the law department*. The results could be quite eye-opening. Word would then spread with more and more companies doing similar research until defined paths might become apparent. For example, perhaps Proctor & Gamble discovers four former practicing lawyers are actually in Brand Management. Suddenly, a new path is defined.

### **Law schools need to get on board**

Few law schools have companies interviewing students on campus for nonlegal jobs upon graduation. Certain elite schools do get some management consulting firms. But these are extremely limited cases. Ex judicata is spending considerable time networking with law schools to have a banner linking back to our site on the career services and/or alumni portals of the law school. To date, we've signed up 70 ABA-accredited law schools.

### **And then there is the ABA**

We quote from our last **Above the Law** article:

*The ABA has been slow to get onboard. All you really need to know is that the lead article [Nine Non-Legal Jobs You Can \(Really, Truly\) Do with a Law Degree](#) on the ABA's Alternative Career site spells "nonlegal" wrong. The most up-to-date piece under "latest resources" is dated October 4, 2023.*

### **Lawyers heal thyself**

Lawyers who want to move to business should be advocating on their own behalf to help get the ball moving. This means making everyone in their ecosystem aware they want to find a nonlegal job.

### **The good news**

More and more attention is being paid to those who want to pursue an alternative path. Here comes the gratuitous mention of AI. Some of the heat and hot water can be traced to the belief that AI will so dramatically reduce entry-level legal positions that alternatives must be found. That is a more advanced discussion for another day. In the meantime, at ex judicata, the majority of our time is spent networking with talent executives as to why they should hire JDs for nonlegal jobs. And it is working.

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***Neil Handwerker and Kimberly Fine are the co-founders of [ex judicata](#), a website providing information, resources, webinars, coaching, money management, and inspirational content for lawyers and law students interested in moving to nonlegal careers. This is their second startup together. Feel free to [email](#) them with any questions or suggestions or connect with them on [LinkedIn](#).***