



**BLANCA RODRÍGUEZ (CMS SPAIN):
“NOT EVERYTHING GOES WHEN IT
COMES TO ATTRACTING TALENT”**

Blanca Rodríguez, CMS Albiñana & Suárez de Lezo's HR director, tells us about lawyers' professional expectations and some of the reasons behind the current 'movement' in the legal sector. Blanca also explains to us what she considers the headhunter's real role should be and the Ethics factor in the recruitment process. How to minimise risks when being about to change for a new job? How to avoid the "noisy stress" allegedly caused by professional social networks? All these questions and many more, are answered by this recruitment expert.

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The legal market is currently experiencing times of great change. We are witnessing a lot of moves (between firms, from law firms to in-house roles, from in-house legal departments to law firms, etc.) in this sector where, traditionally, firms or companies would count on long-lasting employees. These changes are happening at every level, even among veteran employees; we have seen some noteworthy cases of people changing firms, but this is becoming even more frequent among people at the pre-partner or pre-general counsel level, usually made up of senior lawyers who are still on the career ladder, so to speak (i.e., senior associates, principal associates, managing associates, the job titles tend to vary depending on the firm).

In your opinion, what is happening? Is there a lack of motivation, a lack of patience, or just general misdirection? If so, is this caused by internal or external factors, or both (from the company/firm side: market volatility/regulatory changes/competitiveness; from the lawyer/employee's perspective: flexibility, career prospects, opportunities for women, assumptions such as in-house life is more comfortable, etc.?)

For me, it's a combination of all of the above and there are so many different aspects to consider:

- The pandemic and lockdown have changed the outlook many senior lawyers have, realising they can also do things differently. A coach of mine from a while back told me: 'personally, lockdown was the best period

of my life, I was able to get my work done and at the same time I could put my children to bed or spend time with them. I don't think I can go back to what I was doing before'.

- Young people, but also those who aren't so young, have demystified change. They no longer see the company or firm they join when completing their studies as the place they will stay for their entire career, and they are not afraid to move on when something doesn't suit them.

Their goals are short-term, and they are more aware of what they want and need.

- With the return to the office, law firms have not met lawyers' and professionals' expectations. Many expect things to go back to the way they were as if nothing had ever happened, but it did.
- New models, opportunities, and alternatives have emerged

that expand possibilities for those who are open to hearing offers, and we're becoming more and more willing to hear offers.

- We have demystified coaching and mentoring, and a lot of senior lawyers who feel stuck career-wise find the tools to let go and search for new opportunities when they don't feel that their firms are committed to them.

Headhunters are becoming increasingly specialised in the Spanish legal sector, and there are also recruitment agencies that are expanding to this sector. As an HR expert, what are the specificities of recruitment in this sector? What role does a headhunter play in advising the firm/company/individual?

For a few years, I worked as a director in a headhunting agency, so I'm quite familiar with the sector. For me, I think it's important to differentiate between what we can consider 'headhunting' or not.

A good headhunter will usually set high-level profile targets (senior associates or partners) who are not currently looking for a change. Their relationship with clients and candidates is based on trust, ethics, and confidentiality. They outline the job profile by placing themselves in the firm's shoes and creating a target list of firms where they might find the ideal candidate. They have a strong knowledge of the industry and in which firms people may be more open to a possible change (depending on the field and partner) and, once they have a clear strategy, they carry out market intelligence. They attract the right people to the project because they have the right information to do so and, finally, they also advise and guide both parties throughout the negotiations to reach a successful outcome.

What I've been seeing lately are 'lawyers' mercenaries'. Consultancy firms that send emails with two or three spontaneous applications (usually to partners) to create a need without being asked to and they use people often without their consent. Once you tell them you're interested in meeting one of these 'candidates' they usually reply that they are no longer interested but they'll get the process running. They have even sent me CVs containing personal data without having asked for them, generating sensitive and unethical situations, from my point of view.

Insisting on this issue. Ethics should be present in the recruitment process - as so in many others. Is this the case, or is it money that drives this market?

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I believe ethics is a key component, as I explained in the previous question. Working with people is a responsibility, especially when they place their trust in you. We are in a very small industry, so if you don't conduct a respectful, objective, and caring recruitment process, you are doing your brand a disservice.

It is essential to look after the candidate's experience. As for the financial aspect, we must always measure possible internal collateral damage. NOT everything goes when it comes to attracting talent if you are then going to generate internal friction that, in the mid-term, will lead to a new and unwanted departure.

Before deciding to change jobs, professionals seek advice on the new company... It may sound obvious but not everyone in the firm will be like the interviewer or the HR manager. The firm's philosophy is equally important. What advice would you give when trying to make the right decision?

"A good LinkedIn strategy can only add value but, to do so, we need to dedicate time to it."

Throughout my career in people management, both in HR departments and as a headhunter and executive coach, I have come across many lawyers who run away from situations that could have been solved with a quick conversation. However, many professionals prefer to search elsewhere for what they can't find in their firms - as the grass is always greener - and they leave, for a multitude of reasons, instead of trying to solve them where they already have established relationships and opportunities that are not fairly valued, as we take the good things for granted and focus solely on what we would like to change.

My advice is to be clear about what we are looking for: What is our goal with this change? What do we expect from a new project? Have I done everything to reach this aim in our current organisation? Once this has been clearly defined, I recommend carrying out a reverse headhunting process, asking questions and gathering as much information as possible on our goal: Do you know anyone who works there? What can they offer me that I don't already have? It may even be a good idea to suggest to HR a new interview with part of the team to test the waters and make a decision taking into account all the necessary information for it to be a success.

In your opinion, how has the concept of failure in the legal industry evolved?

There's no doubt it has to do with not having done everything we have mentioned. When we let

ourselves be seduced by siren songs without taking control of our careers and making hasty decisions, we are more likely to fail. Being clear about what it is that we bring to the table with our experience, skills, and background, having set our goals and after enough research into what we're going to encounter, and finding that middle ground between what we want, what we bring to the table and what the new project offers us is key to avoid making a mistake and looking back and thinking 'how good I had it before' or 'well, it could have been worse'.

LinkedIn has become a very powerful network, also in the legal sector when it comes to finding a new job. Can all this movement (promotions, job changes, etc.) be 'anxiety-inducing'? And, on the other hand, how do firms value digital visibility/reputation 'dragged along' by potential employees?

I'm quite biased when talking about LinkedIn as it has been

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a crucial tool in my career and it has allowed me to maintain relationships with many people with whom I would have otherwise lost contact with but, as I always say, tools are tools and the important thing is how we use them and our strategy and goals on each platform, and this (particularly on LinkedIn) is key. You decide what you give credibility to and whether you want to be 'an undercover spy' on the network, who never interacts or adds value to others through comments, recommendations and a nurtured looked after network.

A good LinkedIn strategy can only add value but, to do so, we need to dedicate time to it, to take care of our network of contacts and search for potential 'helpers' in view of our goals and communicate keeping in mind what they want to hear rather than what we want to tell them.

LinkedIn is an excellent platform to maximise our visibility and, if well channelled, our reputation.



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