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## CAREERS Lynn Mestel

### Unhappy? Don't stay put

**T**HE TERRORIST ATTACKS of Sept. 11 seem to have shaken an already fragile and uncertain economy and driven it into recession. We read with daily despair the stories of slower corporate and consumer spending, of declining businesses, job losses and company pullbacks in spending for capital expansion and new marketing initiatives.

In uncertain times people generally look for certainty and lawyers, who have a predisposition for stability, especially so. When times get rough, attorneys tend to stick to what they are doing to the point of stagnation. In this economic climate, however, attorneys who are thinking about their career directions should not automatically, or by default, choose staying put as a preferred course of action—rather than risk change in unsure times.

Lawyers, at all levels, should always be most concerned about how their personal career-track is progressing—in good and bad times—and seek corrective action to look after their long-

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term personal and professional growth. To act otherwise, attorneys risk shortchanging themselves and their careers.

#### Sept. 11 shift

For about six months now, I have been counseling a senior partner who holds a substantial book of business at one of the leading firms in New York. He and I had long discussions about his professional stagnation and unhappiness at his current firm. But conversations always ended with him hesitating to organize his credentials so that together we could start the hunt for a new job. Two days after the attacks, I got a call from that partner saying he was ready to take action on his professional future. He had pulled together all of his paperwork and was ready to make calls. His rationale: Life is too short to be stuck in a job that is not rewarding.

Not only is it incumbent on you to manage your own professional growth and development, it is also worth noting that the legal profession—unlike most other professions—does not experience the same ebb and flow as the rest of the economy. There is always demand for, and career movement among, the most qualified and talented lawyers.



KAREN CALDICOTT

In the New York area, for instance, my firm has seen no job decrease for partners and in fact, more and better firms have increased their demand for lateral partner candidates. And while there has been a decline for associates in the mergers and acquisitions sector, many other areas, such as refinancing, workouts and reorganizations, asset-based securitizations and intellectual

Since the beginning of the third quarter and even after Sept. 11, my company has been retained by a number of regional, national and international firms that have asked us to assist them in their search for partners. In addition, our openings for associates in litigation have increased more than 12% during this period, in intellectual property by 14% and, most importantly, our corporate openings have not decreased.

#### NYC's future

Law firms believe that New York is critical to their long-term future and as a result, they are putting resources behind their decision to expand despite the shaky economy here. Nationwide, firms continue to be on the lookout for the best and brightest of our profession to strengthen their firm and increase their market advantage.

My advice to lawyers is to take a reality check and act accordingly: If you love your job and are getting all the right tools to grow and are being sufficiently challenged, by all means you should stay in your job and enjoy it.

On the other hand, if you aren't getting the professional experience to further your career, or the backup to support your practice, then you need to get out in the market.

Similarly, if you believe you are at a dead end, you must realize that opportunities in the legal world abound. Get your curriculum vitae in order and get some help to find that new job.

By looking after your personal long-term career interest today, you and the firm you join may be better positioned in the upturn to reap the rewards. Therefore, professional career strategies should not be affected by events; rather they should be determined by your