

Law360 Pulse: 3 Associates On Leaving BigLaw To Join A Smaller Firm

An uptick in lateral movement in the third quarter of 2023 was driven by vigorous hiring on the part of small and midsize law firms, with nearly 40% of all attorneys who made a move from large firms joining one outside the 200 largest in the U.S. by revenue, according to a recent report.

In the third quarter of the year, legal data company Firm Prospects

at more than 3,000 law firms, representing a 14% increase in lateral hires from the previous quarter.

However, those moves were not uniform when it came to law firm size. The total number of hires actually slowed at the top 200 U.S. law firms, decreasing 17% year-over-year, while small and midsize law firms drove the hiring numbers upward.

Among the 40% of all laterals who left BigLaw to join smaller firms, associates accounted for the highest number of those moves, the data shows. Here, three associates who recently made such a move discuss what led them to consider joining a smaller firm and their observations on how life is different after leaving BigLaw.

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Andrea Jung started her legal career at _____, spending two and a half years as a litigation associate with the BigLaw firm.

However, after she left Cleary to complete a yearlong judicial clerkship with the Hawaii Supreme Court, she chose to join 30-lawyer New York insurance boutique Cohen Ziffer Frenchman & McKenna LLP when she returned to private practice last year.

Jung said she chose to join a small law firm after her clerkship in order to expose herself to more opportunities and take a more active role in the cases she works on than would be possible at a large law firm.

“Compared to bigger firms, you get to do more substantive lawyering in smaller firms because you get to do everything — writing briefs, actively engaging in hearings, or if it’s a small hearing you may get to appear yourself,” Jung said. “That was a huge plus for me.”

Despite the move, which she said was right for her as a midlevel associate, she can also see how large law firms provide good training for junior lawyers.

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Andrea B. Jung