

Finding the opportunities and positives in times of corona - a legal recruiter's perspective



As all businesses, Vialegis is impacted by Covid-19 and the measures implemented as a result of it.

The past few weeks, we have been intensively listening to customers' and candidates' testimonials on how they are experiencing these particular times.

We learned that everybody is facing challenges but, more importantly, that this situation also offers opportunities and positive changes. And what better way to battle negativity and insecurity than by trying to find the positive, even in difficult times.

No one saw it coming...

In only a few weeks' time, Covid-19 hit with a brutal force, impacting all aspects of life as we knew it. People are dying, economies are collapsing, people are stuck at home and social connections are reduced to digital devices. Values we took for granted (e.g. financial security, social contact and freedom) are heavily impacted and many things have become beyond our control.

Anxiety and insecurity are sneaking in which is why it is more important than ever to tap into our human talent of acceptance, positivity and resilience.

Hence, we want to share with you some of the opportunities, positive impacts and changes we identified in the legal market during the last couple of weeks following our conversations with customers and candidates.

1. Legal professionals in times of crisis

While the workload in a lot of sectors is decreasing, legal departments and law firms report that they are still relatively busy.

Legal professionals are proving to be trusted advisors in times of uncertainty. Employers require legal advice on the rights of employers and of employees in times of economic

recession and increasing unemployment. Thousands of business owners are worrying about the financial toll of being closed, their debt, their loss of revenue and their very survival. Everywhere in the world, bankruptcy and business lawyers are responding to urgent calls. Contracts are being (re-)evaluated and renegotiated – never has there been more interest in the concept of ‘force majeure’...

Even though there is no comparison with the efforts of health care workers and medical staff, legal professionals are contributing to help businesses and individuals in these particular times.

2. Reflection on professional happiness

In normal circumstances, most people are too busy to seriously consider the actual level of happiness and satisfaction in their jobs. The past few weeks however, we have noticed a clear shift in awareness amongst our candidates. Being away from their usual office environment, spending more time with their families at home or even losing loved ones, makes them reconsider their priorities and values, oftentimes leading to them questioning their current jobs.

Of course – and understandably – some people are frightened by these turbulent and insecure times, preferring to stay safe and reject any new opportunities at the moment. But there are also candidates who are now, more than ever, open to new opportunities. Lawyers in particular seem to rethink their career since partner promotions, which were already quite scarce, tend to be postponed even longer and portable business is more difficult to quantify at the moment. Lawyers in private practice also see the benefits of being an employee in these times of crisis and are thus more drawn to in-house positions. In general, we notice that people reflect on their current professional situation and on what they want to do in life. A crisis creates an opportunity for (professional) change and growth.

3. The war for talent 2.0

Evidently the effects of the pandemic are being felt in the (legal) recruitment sector. In both our divisions (recruitment and interim management) there is an obvious decrease in new assignments. Attracting new talent is an investment which is often reduced when cost-cutting is of the essence. Surprisingly enough though, there are new recruitment assignments coming in, even in the last six weeks. The impact on recruitment activities for companies is twofold. On the one hand, there are law firms and companies who put all recruitment activity to a stop out of precaution. This is often company policy in large corporate groups. Other law firms and companies however look beyond the present and see hiring opportunities in these turbulent

times. As already mentioned, (good) candidates tend to reflect on (professional) happiness and are open to reorientation. The competition for talent is now less fierce than in normal circumstances so Covid-19 creates hiring opportunities for businesses with a long-term perspective.

4. The rise of homeworking

In recent years we have witnessed an increase in companies that fully embrace the general tendency of flexiwork (allowing professionals to organize their work when and where it suits them best). Unfortunately, there are still a lot of companies who were reluctant to allow flexiwork for their employees.

Covid-19 however forced most companies worldwide to briskly adapt to new ways of working, enabling remote working, organizing digital meetings and combining a family life with demanding hours at work. Companies are left with no choice but to trust their employees to organize their work remotely and flexible. Surely the quarantine is pushing things to an extreme and is not creating the ideal way of working. But it surely helps companies to realize that flexiwork is perfectly possible and does not necessarily impact the quality of work.

We expect and hope that the current circumstances will contribute to a much needed shift in mentality concerning homeworking and remote working opportunities. This shift will allow companies to broaden the pool of talent, lead to a more efficient use of company resources and enhance productivity.

5. Accelerated transformation of the legal industry

Law is often said to be a conservative industry. In terms of digital transformation, the legal industry is definitely leaping behind. Furthermore, the industry is seller-focused, meaning that its service providers dictate the terms of the service provision.

The effects of the Corona virus will accelerate the long due transformation of the legal industry. This seller-centric industry will shift towards a customer-centric industry as competition for talent and clients/customers will intensify in the post-Corona world. (Legal) technology and AI will finally be embraced by traditional legal service providers and it will pave the way for alternative legal service providers to enter the market. A more competitive legal market will most likely result in alternative (and more digital) ways of providing legal services (online platforms, chatbots, AI, video conferences,...), more democratic prices for commoditized legal services and enhanced outsourcing of specific aspects of the legal responsibilities. This transformation will make legal services more accessible for a wider array of customers. An evolution which was bound to happen and will be accelerated because of

the effects of the corona crisis.

It might not always be easy to see the silver lining and find the positive in these unprecedented times. We hope that sharing these positive insights will help you to remain hopeful and positive.

Times of crisis, however hard, always create opportunities and enable changes. We do believe that those with a positive mindset and who succeed in finding and acting upon these opportunities, are the ones who will survive.

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