

The View from Inside

Why Are In-House Counsel Leaving
and Where Are They Going?

AXIOM'S 2022 IN-HOUSE COUNSEL SURVEY REPORT

IN THIS REPORT:

Current Satisfaction Levels and Career Plans of In-House Counsel

New Career Priorities Since the Pandemic Began

Next Steps for In-House Counsel and Their Careers

INTRODUCTION

The Great Reflection

Call it the Great Resignation, the Great Reshuffling, or as we like to call it at Axiom, the Great Reflection. No matter what phrase you use, it's clear lawyers everywhere are reconsidering where and how they want to pursue their legal careers. The pandemic upended the traditional legal practice model for in-house legal departments, which is now once again being impacted by inflationary and recessionary forces.

So what exactly do in-house counsel think about their careers right now and where are they envisioning their futures? We set out to examine the current mindset of counsel across a wide range of industries and practice areas to discover what pressures in-house counsel are facing within their legal departments. In this report, we dig deep into all the ways lawyers want to improve both their professional and work lives.

The news flash? Not surprising, but still startling: in-house counsel aren't satisfied with the current state of affairs, and even among those who are, resignations are going to continue.

The comprehensive report that follows delves into the reasons why lawyers are leaving once sought-after in-house roles and offers insight into where they're looking to go.

The Axiom Survey was conducted by [Wakefield Research](#) among 300 US in-house counsel working at organizations with a minimum annual revenue of \$1M between May 23 and June 3, 2022, using an email invitation and an online survey. Revenue quotas were set for 100 respondents at companies with \$1M to \$25M in annual revenue and for 200 respondents at companies with more than \$25M in annual revenue.

IN THIS REPORT:

- **CURRENT SATISFACTION LEVELS AND CAREER PLANS OF IN-HOUSE COUNSEL:**
 - Burnout and plans to leave current positions
 - Root of low satisfaction and high stress rates
 - Pandemic's effects on career priorities

- **IN-HOUSE COUNSEL VIEWS ON:**
 - Work/life balance
 - Engaging and challenging legal work
 - Alignment between the in-house role and both department and organizational business objectives
 - Career advancement
 - DEI initiatives

- **SEARCH FOR NEW LIFE IN LAW:**
 - Careers outside of the in-house role
 - Interest in flexible legal staffing providers
 - Remote work

- **NEXT STEPS FOR IN-HOUSE COUNSEL AND THEIR CAREERS**



OVERVIEW

Key Findings

Most in-house counsel view their current positions as not completely aligned with the legal department or with the company as a whole (94% and 87%, respectively), as well as stressful (78%) and unengaging (34%). As a result, most (57%) are open to new positions, with 39% considering a flexible legal talent provider for their next position. Sixty-two percent say the pandemic heightened their interest in this type of position.

Forty-two percent of in-house counsel are not completely satisfied with their current position, stemming from stress and burnout from a lack of work/life balance. In addition, the 34% who found their work unengaging stated their top complaints are rooted in repetitive tasks, work that is not aligned with the organization's objectives, and administrative burdens.

As a result, most (57%) in-house counsel are open to another job, including 14% who are actively searching for a new position at this moment. Of those, 74% are open to joining a flexible legal talent provider. In fact, the pandemic has caused a staggering 93% of in-house counsel to reassess their career priorities; this includes those who value work/life balance and remote work, both of which can generally be found in flexible legal talent positions.

Low headcount and burdensome administrative tasks are taxing in-house legal departments.

In-house legal counsel are facing major obstacles over resourcing issues. While 41% report that a core problem they face is not having the appropriate amount of staffing bandwidth, the overwhelming majority (89%) also agree that their legal department has suffered from attrition-related issues. In addition, half report difficulty in hiring legal talent that addresses their needs.

While this would present challenges in any environment, the work has only picked up over the past several years. Virtually all in-house legal counsel (99%) report both that the volume of legal matters with which they're dealing, as well as the complexity of those matters, has considerably increased in the past few years.

As a result, 41% report spending too much time on administrative tasks as a core problem preventing their team from getting their work done effectively. This cyclical problem leads to more administrative tasks, which puts even more pressure on the existing team.

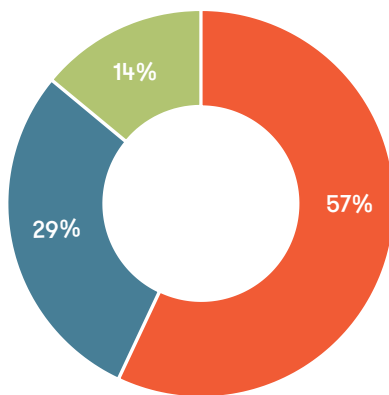
DIVING DEEPER

Current Satisfaction Levels and Career Plans of In-House Counsel

With increased workloads, increased complexity of legal matters, and fewer bandwidth and technical resources, many in-house counsel are burned out and dissatisfied with their current jobs. They're also worried their departments will face attrition issues, heightening their desire to jump ship before it gets worse. Even those who are satisfied are still at least open to, or even actively searching for, new opportunities. The pandemic has caused most in-house counsel to reevaluate what's important to them in their careers.

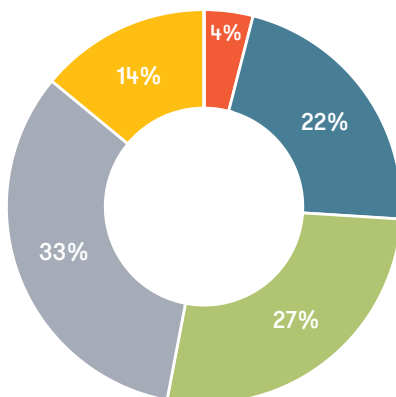
Most In-House Counsel Are Open to a New Position

A strong majority of in-house counsel (57%) are open to a new position, with another 14% saying they are actively searching for a new position right now. Of those not actively searching, most (53%) report it's somewhat likely they'll look for a new position within the next year.



CURRENT JOB SEARCH STATUS

- Open to a new position but not actively searching
- Not interested in a new position right now
- Actively searching for a new position



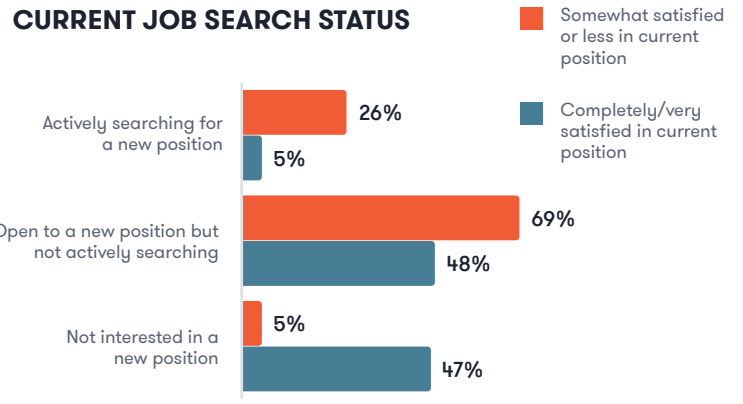
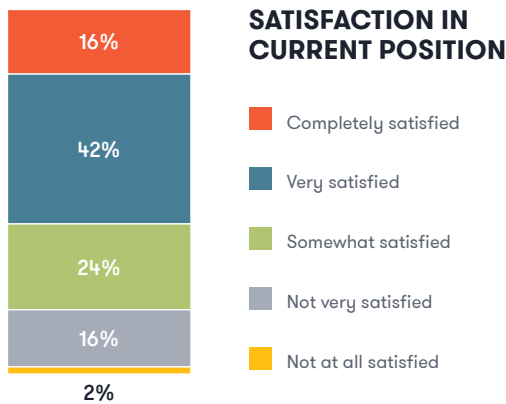
LIKELIHOOD OF LOOKING FOR A NEW POSITION WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR

(Of those not actively searching for a new position)

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely

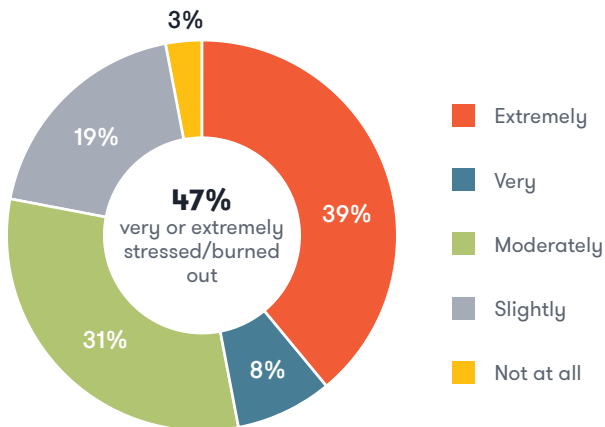
The Perfect Storm for Attrition: Low Job Satisfaction and Burnout

Nearly half of in-house counsel (42%) are somewhat satisfied or less with their current position, and only 16% are completely satisfied with their current position. Many who aren't satisfied are already looking for a new position. What is most reflective of the current Great Reflection (or Great Resignation) is that the majority of respondents (57%) are at least open to a new position despite not actively searching, and nearly half of those who are satisfied (48%) would still be open to a new position. Regardless of job satisfaction and burnout, a large number of in-house counsel could leave their current position.

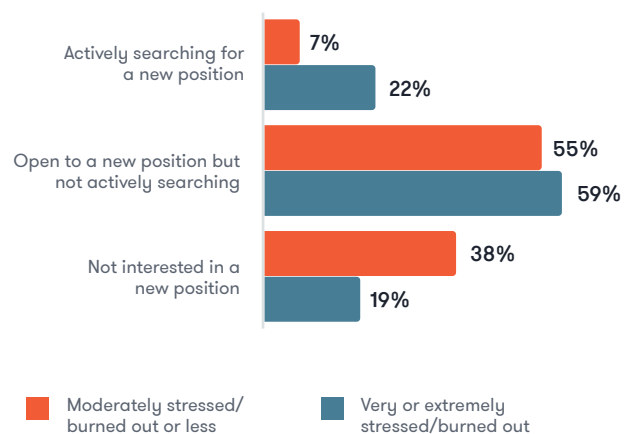


Like most American workers during the past few years, lawyers are facing increased levels of burnout and stress, which are often two of the biggest contributors to someone leaving their job. Multiple studies about the job market during the Great Resignation have shown industries with increased levels of job stress have higher levels of attrition. More than three-quarters (78%) report feeling stressed or burned out in their current role with nearly half of all respondents (47%) being very or extremely stressed or burned out. Of those who are very or extremely stressed, 69% are likely to look for a new job within the next year.

LEVEL OF STRESS/BURN OUT IN CURRENT ROLE



CURRENT JOB SEARCH STATUS

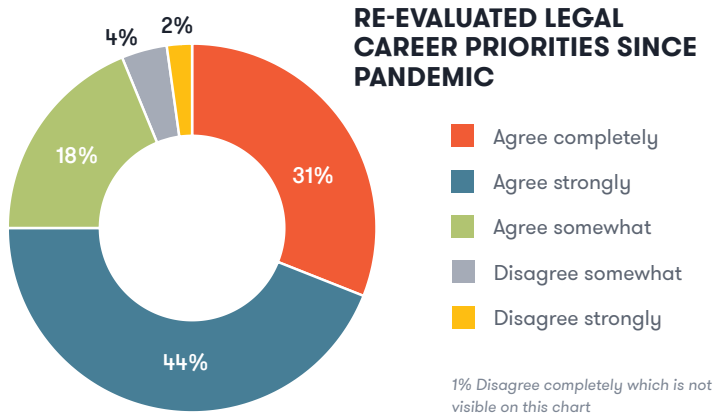
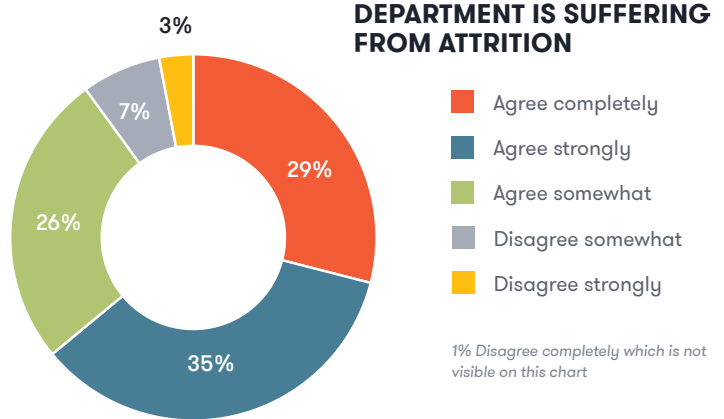


Why Are In-House Counsel Unhappy in Their Positions?

In-house counsel experienced increased workloads and complexity but with fewer resources and bandwidth to complete their jobs. Almost every single respondent (99%) reports the volume of legal matters they've supported in the last few years has increased, and 100% of those who reported being extremely or very stressed reported their workloads increased.

Similarly, 89% of counsel report their legal department is already suffering from attrition-related issues, and of those respondents, **90% are looking for a new job in the next 1 to 2 years**. This indicates attrition will continue to worsen as lawyers who work for legal departments facing attrition consider getting out before it gets worse.

In addition to burnout and stress, there are multiple factors causing in-house counsel to feel dissatisfied at work. A whopping 93% say that since the pandemic, they have re-evaluated what's important in their legal careers, and of those, almost all (**92%**) are likely to search for a job in the next year.



NEW CAREER PRIORITIES SINCE THE PANDEMIC BEGAN

Work/life balance and mental health resources are the top two assets reported as being more important now than in the past, though many respondents are interested in remote work, professional development opportunities, and competitive compensation as well. It's not surprising that most lawyers are reevaluating their careers when we consider the majority of them reported feeling stressed and burned out. To alleviate stress, lawyers want careers where they can have a better work/life balance, flexibility in where they work, and appropriate mental health resources from their employers.

THINGS THAT HAVE BECOME MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN IN THE PAST

(Asked among those who have re-evaluated their career in the past two years)

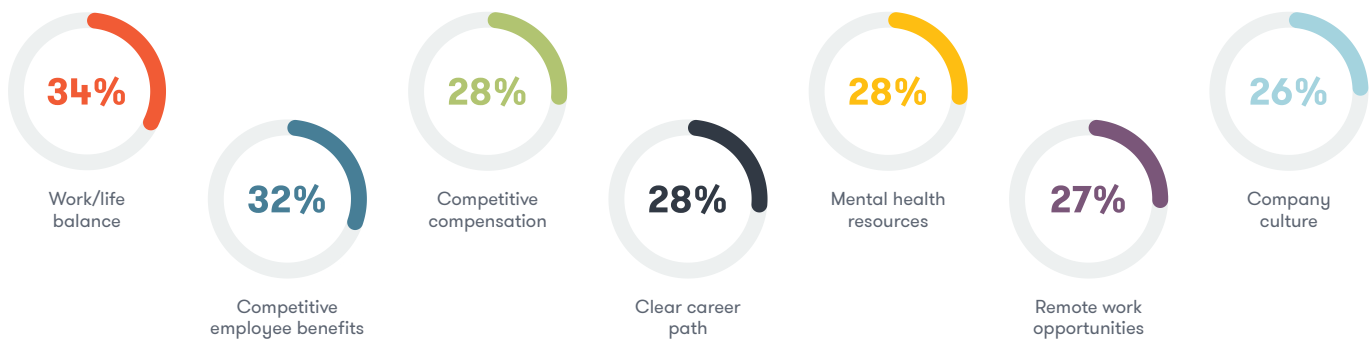


LACK OF WORK/LIFE BALANCE

Approximately a third of in-house counsel say they lack work/life balance, competitive benefits, and competitive compensation. When asked to select any or all attributes their current position does not offer, the top three are work/life balance (37%), competitive employee benefits (32%), and competitive compensation (28%). A clear career path and company culture are also commonly rated as missing from their current role.

THINGS THEIR POSITION DOES NOT OFFER

(Asked among those who have re-evaluated their career in the past two years)

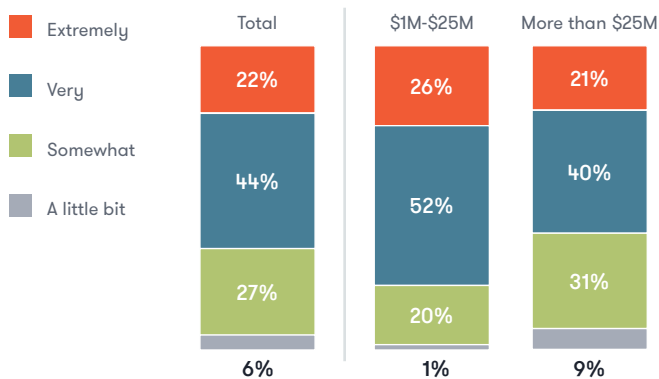


Only 9% of respondents said their company offered all attributes of work/life balance, competitive employee benefits, competitive compensation, clear career path, mental health resources, remote work opportunities, and company culture.

LACK OF ENGAGING OR CHALLENGING LEGAL WORK

Over a third of in-house counsel say their work is not challenging and engaging, and this jumps to 40% among those who work at companies with annual revenue greater than \$25M. The top reasons are repetitive tasks or legal matters instead of more complex matters (43%), and work is not aligned to the broader objectives of the company. Other popular answers include administrative burdens outside the practice of law/actual legal work (41%) and siloed into one niche area/specialization (39%).

HOW ENGAGING AND CHALLENGING THE WORK IS



Reason for work being unengaging or uninteresting:

(Asked among those who do not find their work very or extremely engaging or challenging)

43%

Repetitive tasks rather than complex matters

43%

Work isn't aligned with company objectives

39%

Siloed into one niche area/specialization

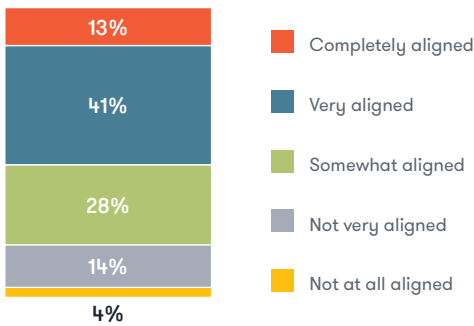
41%

Administrative burdens outside legal/actual work

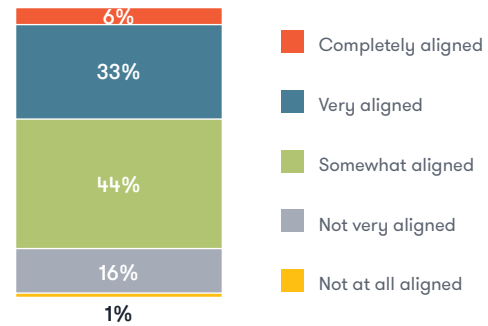
MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN ROLE AND BOTH DEPARTMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL BUSINESS OBJECTIVES

Most respondents (94%) lack alignment with their legal department and larger business organization. Just 13% of in-house counsel feel their role is completely aligned with the strategic business objectives of the broader organization. Of those who said they are not completely aligned with their legal department, 94% are looking for a new job in the next 1 to 2 years. Even worse, only 6% of in-house counsel feel their role is completely aligned with their legal department's goals and strategic objectives. Of those who said they are not completely aligned with their organizational business goals, 91% are looking for a new job in the next 1 to 2 years.

LEVEL OF ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ROLE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE BROADER ORGANIZATION

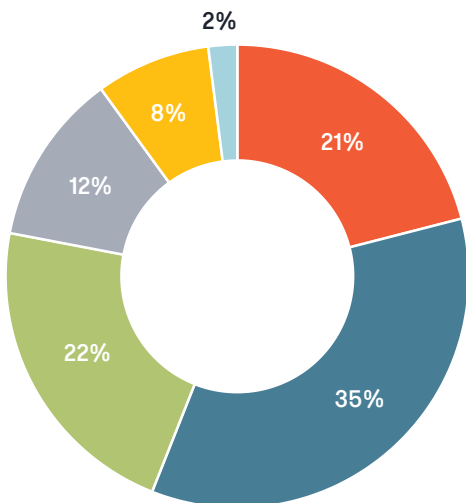


LEVEL OF ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ROLE AND LEGAL DEPARTMENT GOALS



LOW LIKELIHOOD OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT

More than three-quarters (78%) agree that to advance their career, they will need to change employers. Of those who agree, 89% are looking to find new positions in the next 1 to 2 years. These striking statistics highlight, once again, that attrition rates will only continue to worsen within legal departments.



LIKELIHOOD OF CAREER ADVANCEMENT

- Agree completely
- Agree strongly
- Agree somewhat
- Disagree somewhat
- Disagree strongly
- Disagree completely

1% Disagree completely which is not visible on this chart

89%
who agree are likely to look for a new position in the next 1 to 2 years



WOMEN LACK WORK/LIFE BALANCE AND A CLEAR CAREER PATH COMPARED TO MEN

Multiple studies have shown working women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, and even before this, many women have felt more pressure to balance their legal careers with their family obligations. It shouldn't come as a surprise that in this survey 38% of those who identify as women say they don't have work/life balance, compared to 33% of those who identify as men, and 32% of women say they have no clear career path, compared to only 27% of men.

Women also say the greatest impact on their dissatisfaction is a lack of competitive employee benefits (24%) compared to only 16% of men.

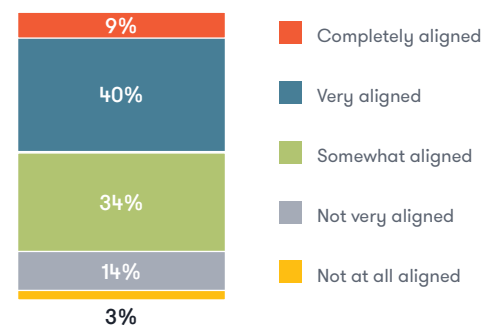
NEED FOR DEI IMPROVEMENT

Almost all in-house counsel say their organization is less than completely committed to diversity and DEI initiatives, with half (51%) saying they are only somewhat committed or less.

51%

are only somewhat committed or less to diversity and DEI initiatives.

LEGAL DEPARTMENT'S COMMITMENT TO DEI INITIATIVES



ON THE HORIZON

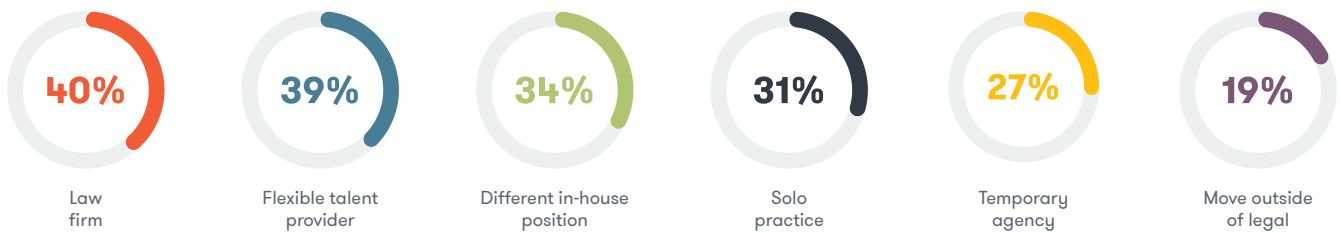
Looking for a New Life in Law

Based on all the above, it should come as no surprise in-house counsel are considering new opportunities that fit their career aspirations and align with their personal goals. During this time of Great Reflection, lawyers at every stage of their legal career are reevaluating what's important to them, and flexible legal staffing providers are growing in popularity as a legal career option, even more so than finding another in-house position.

Careers Outside of the Legal Department

In-house counsel would equally consider a law firm (40%) or a flexible talent provider (39%) for their next position, but only 34% would consider another in-house position. This emphasizes the current dissatisfaction among in-house counsel.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR NEW POSITION

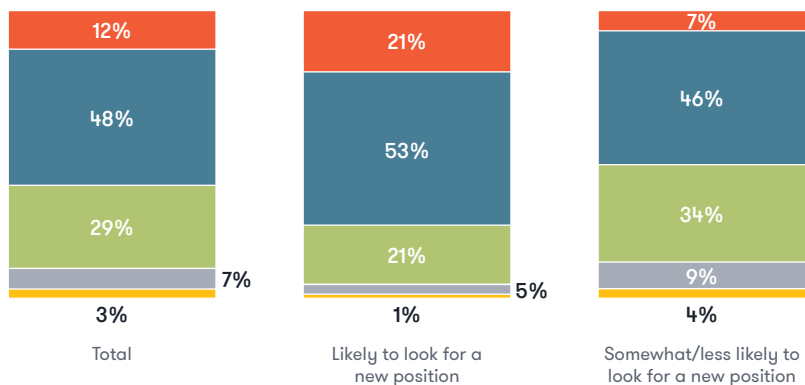


INTEREST IN FLEXIBLE LEGAL TALENT PROVIDERS AS EMPLOYMENT

A majority of in-house counsel (61%) would be very or extremely interested in joining a flexible legal talent provider, and almost all respondents (97%) said they were at least a little bit interested. Among those who are currently looking for a new position or are very or extremely likely to do so within the next year, nearly three-fourths (74%) are interested in joining a flexible legal talent provider. Of those who are not completely aligned with their organization's business goals, 96% of in-house counsel are interested in joining a flexible legal provider.

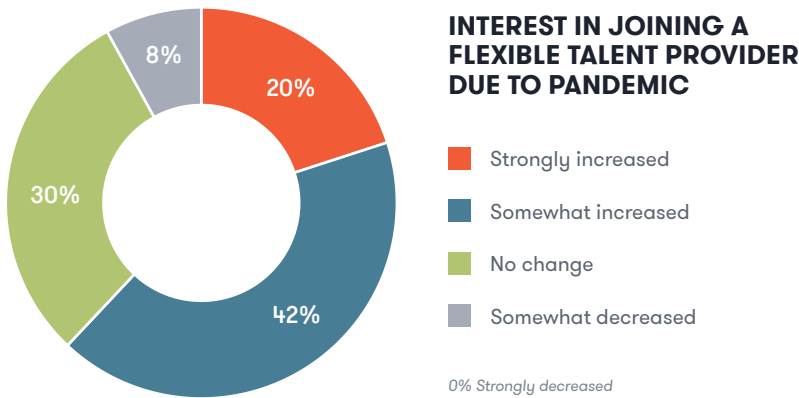
LEVEL OF INTEREST IN JOINING A FLEXIBLE TALENT PROVIDER

- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- A little bit interested
- Not at all interested



THE PANDEMIC HAS INCREASED INTEREST IN FLEXIBLE TALENT PROVIDERS

So how has the pandemic influenced lawyers views of flexible talent providers as a career choice? Sixty-two percent say the pandemic has increased their interest, which is not surprising given the factors that have become more important among those who have re-evaluated their career. Flexible legal talent providers a greater ability to attain work/life balance and remote work opportunities many are now seeking. Of those who selected they would choose a flexible legal provider, 40% are extremely or very burned out.



Attributes that have become more important now than in the past:

(Asked among those who have re-evaluated their career)

44% work/life balance has become more important now than in the past

36% remote work opportunities have become more important now than in the past

Of those who are stressed, burned out, and looking for a new job within the next year, 54% were interested in joining a flexible legal provider. For those who say they think they need to leave their current position to advance their career, most (79%) are interested in a flexible legal talent provider. Interest in joining a provider of this model is highest among those at businesses with a revenue of \$1M to \$25M, those who have worked for an Am Law 200 firm in the past, and those who are younger than 45 years old.

Interest is highest among...

65% Those at businesses with a revenue of \$1M-\$25M

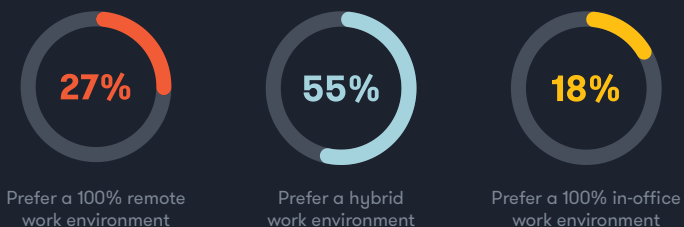
65% Those who've worked for an Am Law 200 firm

73% Those younger than age 45

The pandemic has caused almost 3 in 4 lawyers who identify as women (71%) to be interested in joining a flexible legal provider.

IN-HOUSE COUNSEL DESIRE A HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT

Over half prefer a hybrid remote/in-person work environment, and another 18% prefer a fully remote work environment. Over a third (36%) say the opportunity for remote work has become more important to them now than before the pandemic. This figure jumps to 44% among those who are looking for a new position or likely to do so within the next year.



36% of in-house counsel who have re-evaluated their careers say **remote work has become more important** now than before the pandemic

44% of those already looking for a new position or very/extremely likely to do so in the next year say **remote work has become more important**

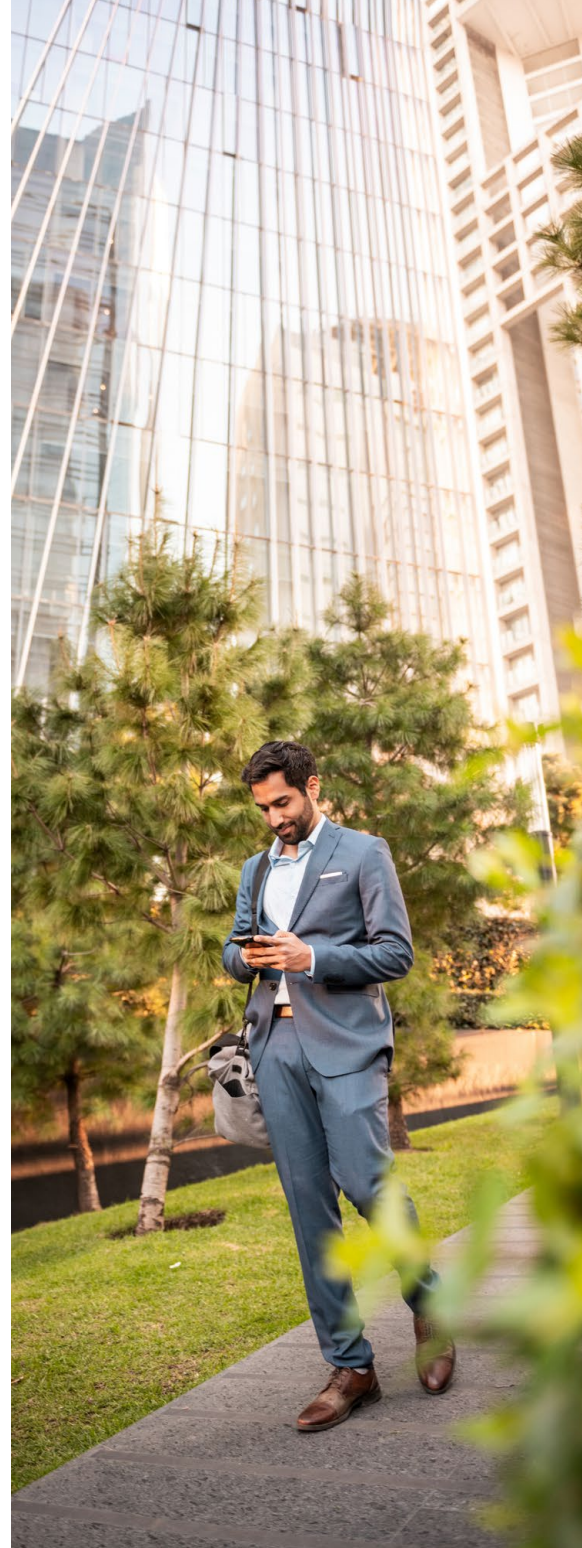
CONCLUSION

In-House Counsel Are Ready for Change. So, What's Next?

Axiom's report finds most in-house counsel are not satisfied in their current position, due to factors like burnout, low bandwidth, burdensome administrative tasks, misalignment with their department goals, and unengaging and unchallenging work. While that in itself may not be startling, what is more surprising is that regardless of satisfaction or burnout, most in-house counsel reported they are open to a new position. **In-house counsel are re-evaluating their career options to match their new priorities.**

They want more work/life balance and opportunities for career growth, along with engaging legal work. This is why the majority of in-house counsel report they are open to flexible legal staffing providers. This model of employment is the smart choice for lawyers seeking new careers in the legal industry, particularly while in-house roles are proving to be a risky choice during today's volatile legal environment. More than ever, lawyers from all career stages, industries, and practice areas have the power to choose where, how, and when they work.

Contact [Axiom](#) today to learn more about this report or what kind of [career options](#) are available.



Axiom is where legal teams go to find the right talent for everything from everyday in-house tasks to complex in-house and outside counsel work. Too many legal departments are stuck having to choose between paying the high fees of their law firm, hiring full-time employees they don't need, or turning to a low-cost agency that can't meet their quality standards. At the same time, top lawyers want to work on challenging legal matters, but they want more control over how, when, and where they practice. Both are forced compromises that no one should have to make. Axiom shares and meets the higher standards of its clients and lawyers, with our "work smarter, adapt faster, go further" approach – connecting growing mid-market and Fortune 500 companies with the world's deepest bench of experienced, specialized legal talent. With a net promoter score of 58, 99% of clients recommend us, and four out of five rate our lawyers as equal to or better than lawyers from a law firm. **Axiom. Higher standards welcome.**

@ AXIOM@AXIOMLAW.COM

(877) 959-0800

WWW.AXIOMLAW.COM/CONTACT-US

axiom | HIGHER
STANDARDS
WELCOME