How to Use Your Law Degree without Practicing Law

Summary: What can you do with a law degree, besides practice law?
You did it. You got a law degree. Now you’re in almost $180,000 in debt, but everyone you know thinks you’re smart and going to be a rich, high-powered attorney one day. The problem is, you realized that you don’t want to actually be an attorney. So what to do?

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Actually, there’s a lot of options for you. A law degree may not seem like a big deal to you now that you don’t want to practice, but in actuality, the knowledge and skills you acquired are incredibly valuable in the real world. Everyone is affected by laws; yet very few people actually know their rights or how the system works. That’s where you come in.

Harrison Barnes, the CEO of BCG Attorney Search, has seen it all when it comes to job searching. By running one of the top legal placement agencies, Barnes has found jobs for thousands of attorneys across the country, and he has helped others with JDs find their paths, even if that didn’t include being a lawyer.

"In my career spanning more than two decades as an attorney and legal recruiter, I have met an astonishing number of people who have chosen nontraditional legal careers," Barnes said. "With very, very few exceptions, most of these people are far happier than they ever were practicing law. A good number of these people who left the legal practice also make more money in their new professions."

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Barnes said that people with a law background who are looking for a new career can go into anything from politics to the arts.

Just one look at Washington, DC gives us a glimpse of life with a law degree outside of a firm. Politicians, lobbyists and government workers can all benefit from having a background in law as they directly work with people to enact policies and change.

For those who still want to be in the legal field but just not as an attorney, other options exist for those with a law degree. These positions include arbitrator, law professor, law school career counselor, and legal recruiter.

While some people go into law for the money, a big paycheck isn’t guaranteed due to the current competitive climate. So that’s why any attorney hungry for money should use their education to transition into the business world. Available positions include management consultant, entrepreneur, labor negotiator, and analyst roles.

And lastly, if any type of stuffy office environment makes you want to hurl, you can use your law degree and work in the arts, media or entertainment. John Grisham used his legal experience to write bestselling novels about lawyers and cases. Nancy Grace took her take-charge personality and legal commentary, and got her own high-profile TV show. Sports and entertainment agencies are always looking for law school graduates to become agents because they know those grads are motivated, intelligent, and can negotiate deals.

For more non-legal job ideas, see: 60 Nontraditional Job You Can Do with a Law Degree

What do you think are alternative career options for people with law degrees who do not want to practice law?