

The Pivot — Real Stories of Career Reinvention in Health Law

Career paths in health law are rarely linear. AHLA Fellows and leaders shared their personal experiences navigating pivotal career transitions—from law firms to in-house roles, government to private practice, and beyond. Panelists discussed how they recognized it was time for a change, the questions they asked before making a move, and the lessons learned along the way.

The single most consistent signal across every panelist's story was the same: they have never stopped learning and growing.

A moment of clarity often came when the work no longer challenged or energized them. A useful question to ask yourself is whether you are still curious. A bad week or a difficult stretch is not the same as a pattern of stagnation. If you find yourself consistently going through the motions rather than genuinely engaging, it may be time to look up from your desk and consider your options.

It is also worth considering whether staying is serving others around you. Sometimes moving on opens the door for someone on your team who is ready to grow into that role — benefiting both the organization and the people you have been mentoring.

Leaving an established practice, a stable government role, or a familiar environment carries real uncertainty, both financially and professionally. The advice that emerged most strongly was to lean on AHLA colleagues and others in your professional network before you leap. The people who know you outside your current organization often see your strengths and fit more clearly than you do yourself.

Be transparent about what you bring. Your value may be the breadth of your experience, your ability to simplify complexity, and these transferable skills become your currency. Own that.

Don't expect the financial calculation to be simple, but don't let it stop you either. Several panelists acknowledged the compensation shift, particularly when moving from firms to government or from large organizations to smaller ones. The consensus was that investing in a new kind of experience can compound into future opportunities that more than make up for short-term trade-offs — but that calculus is deeply personal and depends on where you are in your life.

The other side of a transition is not just a new job — it is a chance to amplify what you care about.

Panelists: *Lois Dehls Cornell, Executive Vice President, Massachusetts Medical Society and AHLA Fellow (Moderator) | Greg Demske, Goodwin Procter LLP and AHLA Fellow | David Cade, CEO, American Health Law Association | Tim Adelman, General Counsel & Chief Legal Officer, Luminis Health, Inc. and AHLA Fellow | Saralisa Brau, Corporate Secretary & Assistant General Counsel, McKesson Corporation and AHLA Board Member*