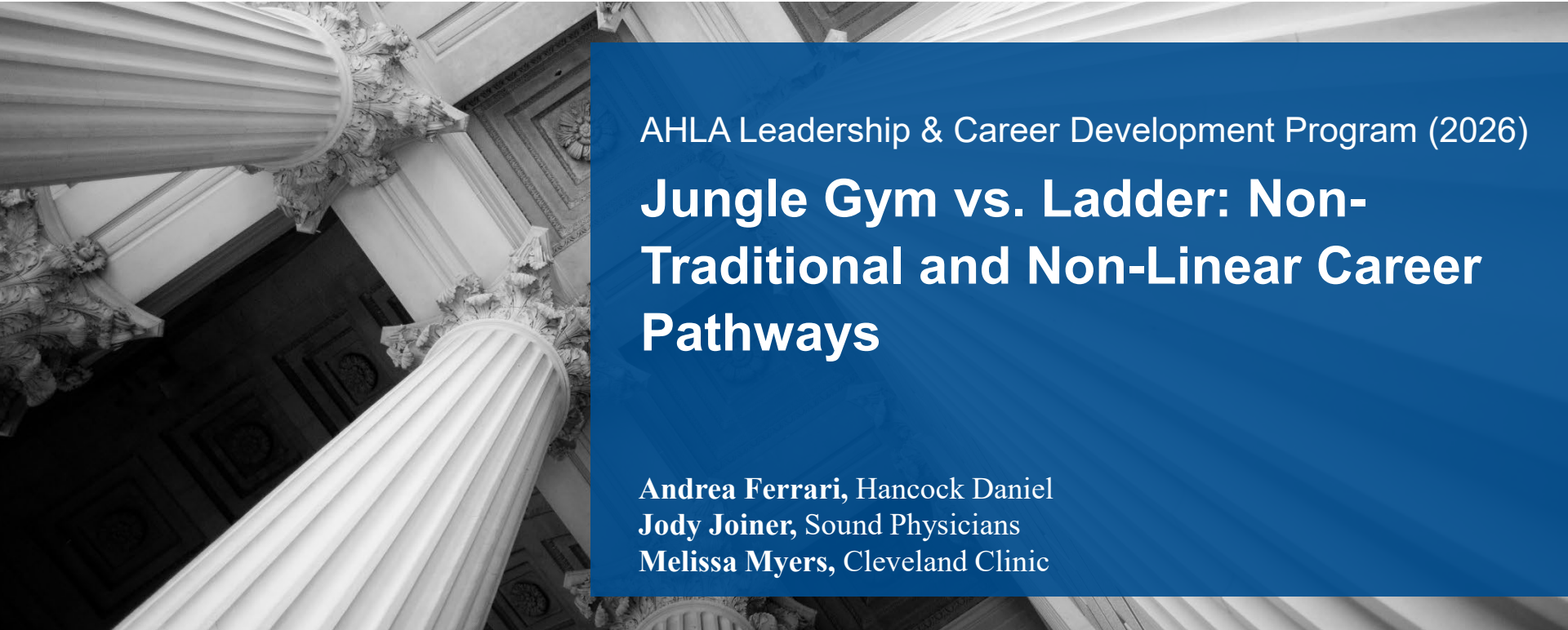




AHLA Leadership & Career Development Program (2026)

# **Jungle Gym vs. Ladder: Non-Traditional and Non-Linear Career Pathways**

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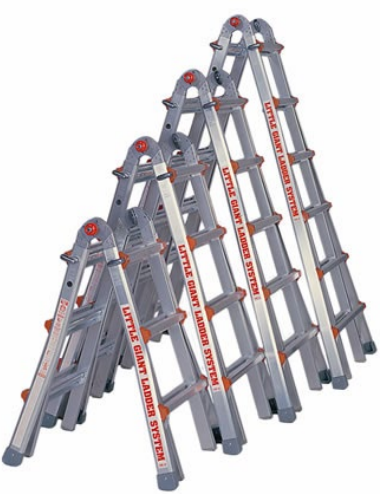
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“Careers are a jungle gym, not a ladder.”

~ Sheryl Sandberg





# Ladder Selection 101:

**The Pros and Cons of  
Different Ladder Materials**

# Definitions



# Definitions



## “Non-Linear and Non-Traditional Career Paths”

### Non-Linear:

- ❖ Merriam Webster: Not linear
  - ❑ Linear: **(1)** of, relating to, resembling, or having a graph that is a line and especially a straight line **(2)** involving a single dimension
- ❖ Cambridge Dictionary: Used to describe a process, series of events, etc. in which one thing does not clearly or directly follow from another:
  - ❑ Example Use: A non-linear career path/system/narrative

# Definitions



## “Non-Linear and Non-Traditional Career Paths”

### Non-Traditional:

- ❖ Merriam Webster: : Not following or conforming to tradition : not adhering to past practices or conventions : not traditional
  - ❑ Tradition: (1) an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (such as a religious practice or a social custom): (2) a belief or story or a body of beliefs or stories relating to the past that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable
- ❖ Cambridge Dictionary: Different from what was considered usual or typical in the past:
  - ❑ Example: Non-traditional families/medicine/methods

# Statistics





“There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.”

~ Various





# Statistics



## Starting Out



AMERICANBARASSOCIATION

### WHY DO UNDERGRADUATES ASPIRE TO GO TO LAW SCHOOL?

|                                                                        |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Pathway for career in politics, government or public service           | 44% |
| Passionate/high interest in type of work                               | 42% |
| Opportunities to be helpful to others or useful to society/giving back | 35% |
| Advocate for social change                                             | 32% |
| Access to high-paying jobs                                             | 31% |

#### REFERENCES/SOURCES:

<https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/legal-education/>

*Source: Before the JD: Undergraduate Views on Law School, American Association of Law Schools and Gallup (2018 national survey)*



# Statistics



## Starting Out

### REFERENCES/SOURCES:

<https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/legal-education/>

<https://www.nalp.org/0925research>

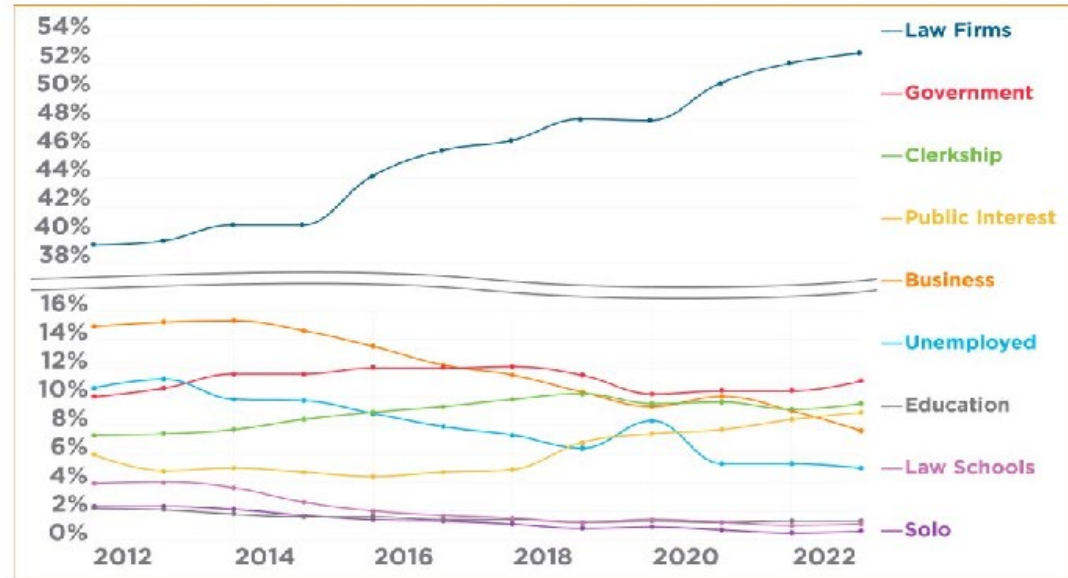
[https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal\\_education\\_and\\_admissions\\_to\\_the\\_bar/statistics/2024/class-of-2023-online-table.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/statistics/2024/class-of-2023-online-table.pdf)

| Current New Graduates Go To:                                     | % of Grads |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Private Law Firms                                                | 50%-60%    |
| “Big Law” (251+ attorneys)                                       | 20%-25%    |
| Public Interest Roles:                                           | 30%-35%    |
| • Federal/state/local government roles, not including clerkships | 10%-15%    |
| ▪ Judicial clerkships                                            | 10%-15%    |

# Statistics



## Starting Out



Where law school graduates work 10 months after graduating

### REFERENCES/SOURCES:

<https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/legal-education/>

Source: *ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar*

# Statistics



## Starting Out

### REFERENCES/SOURCES:

<https://www.nalp.org/2001novtrends>

Law Firm Jobs by Firm Size — Classes of 1982-2000  
(percent of law firm jobs taken in each size firm)

| Year | Size of Firm (number of attorneys) |      |       |       |        |             |
|------|------------------------------------|------|-------|-------|--------|-------------|
|      | Solo                               | 2-10 | 11-25 | 26-50 | 51-100 | 101 or more |
| 1982 | 7.6                                | 40.3 | 14.8  | 11.1  | 10.7   | 15.6        |
| 1983 | 7.1                                | 41.1 | 15.1  | 11.2  | 10.1   | 15.4        |
| 1984 | 6.6                                | 39.7 | 15.0  | 11.1  | 10.4   | 17.2        |
| 1985 | 5.0                                | 35.7 | 15.1  | 11.7  | 12.0   | 20.6        |
| 1986 | 4.3                                | 32.4 | 15.6  | 12.0  | 12.5   | 23.2        |
| 1987 | 3.3                                | 31.6 | 15.3  | 12.9  | 12.8   | 24.1        |
| 1988 | 2.7                                | 28.6 | 14.5  | 12.2  | 13.4   | 28.6        |
| 1989 | 2.8                                | 24.6 | 15.0  | 12.6  | 14.8   | 30.2        |
| 1990 | 3.6                                | 28.7 | 13.1  | 11.6  | 12.2   | 30.8        |
| 1991 | 5.2                                | 33.1 | 12.5  | 10.3  | 10.0   | 28.9        |
| 1992 | 6.8                                | 38.0 | 13.5  | 9.1   | 9.1    | 23.6        |
| 1993 | 7.5                                | 41.5 | 13.1  | 7.8   | 7.9    | 22.2        |
| 1994 | 6.2                                | 41.0 | 12.2  | 7.6   | 8.1    | 24.9        |
| 1995 | 6.0                                | 40.9 | 12.3  | 7.5   | 7.5    | 25.8        |
| 1996 | 6.1                                | 39.3 | 11.8  | 7.4   | 7.5    | 27.9        |
| 1997 | 5.7                                | 36.4 | 12.0  | 7.7   | 7.6    | 30.6        |
| 1998 | 3.8                                | 33.5 | 11.5  | 7.7   | 8.0    | 35.5        |
| 1999 | 3.2                                | 31.4 | 11.1  | 7.4   | 7.7    | 39.1        |
| 2000 | 2.7                                | 30.2 | 10.8  | 7.7   | 7.6    | 41.0        |

Note: Figures for 1989 and 1990 reflect only full-time law firm jobs; for all other years figures reflect all law firm jobs acquired by graduates. Figures in this table differ slightly from those published in earlier *ERSSampler* reports or *Bulletin* columns because law firm jobs for which firm size was not reported are excluded from the base.

# Statistics



## Changes and Firsts



|           | Associates                  | Law Firm Partners                              |
|-----------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1980      | 8% of all lawyers are women | 0% to <1%                                      |
| 2000      | 27%                         | 16%                                            |
| 2013-2015 | 45%                         | 20%                                            |
| 2020      | 47%                         | 32% Non-Equity Partners<br>22% Equity Partners |
| 2023      | 59%                         | 28% All Partners                               |
| 2025-2026 | 52%                         | 30% All Partners<br>26% Equity Partners        |

### REFERENCES/SOURCES:

<https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/legal-education/>

<https://www.nalp.org/research>

# Statistics

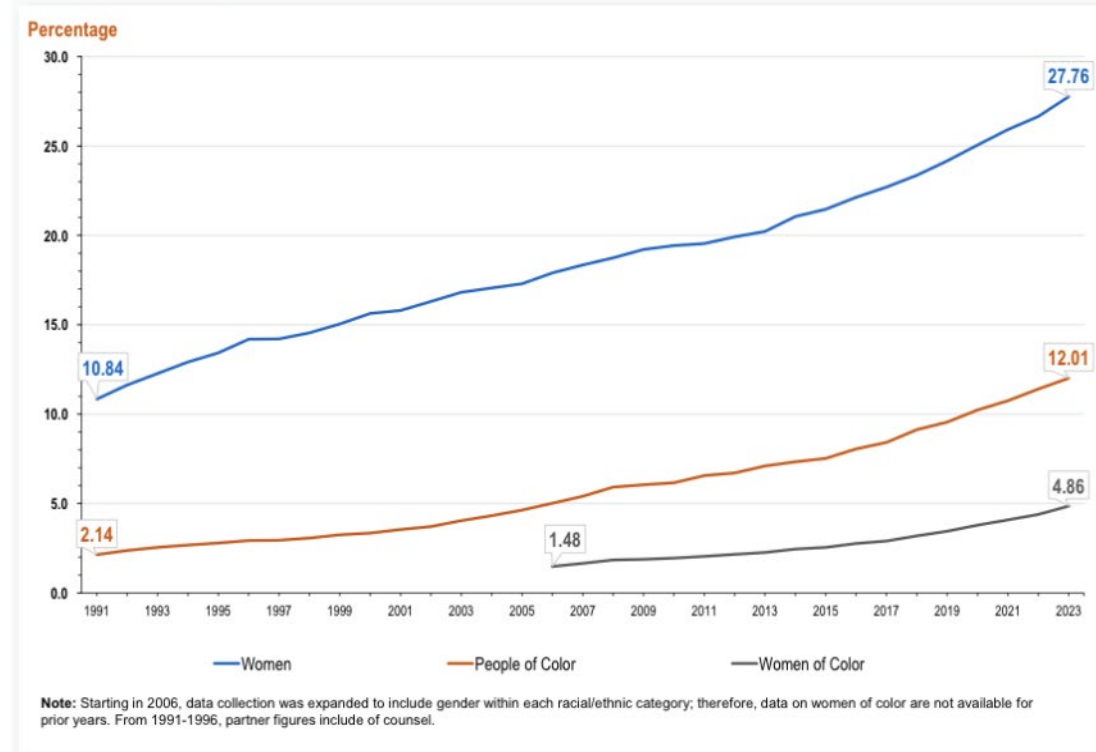
## Current Snapshot



### REFERENCES/SOURCES:

<https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/legal-education/>

**Chart 1. Percentage of Partners Who are Women and People of Color at Law Firms, 1991-2023**



# Statistics

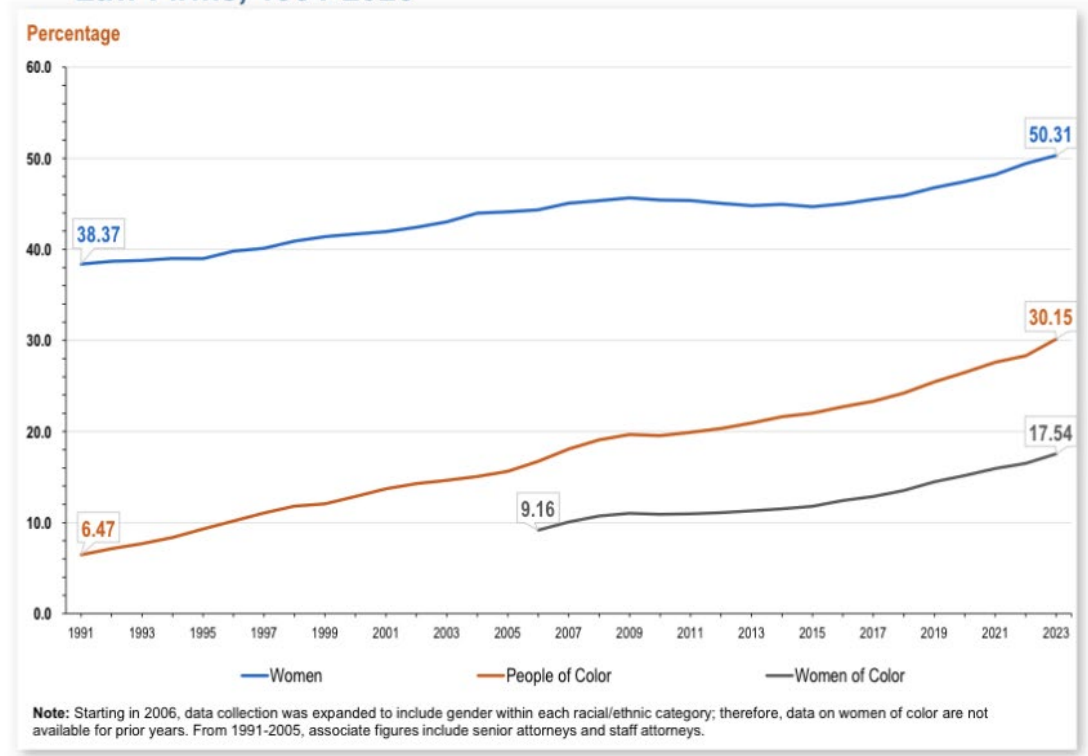
## Current Snapshot



### REFERENCES/SOURCES:

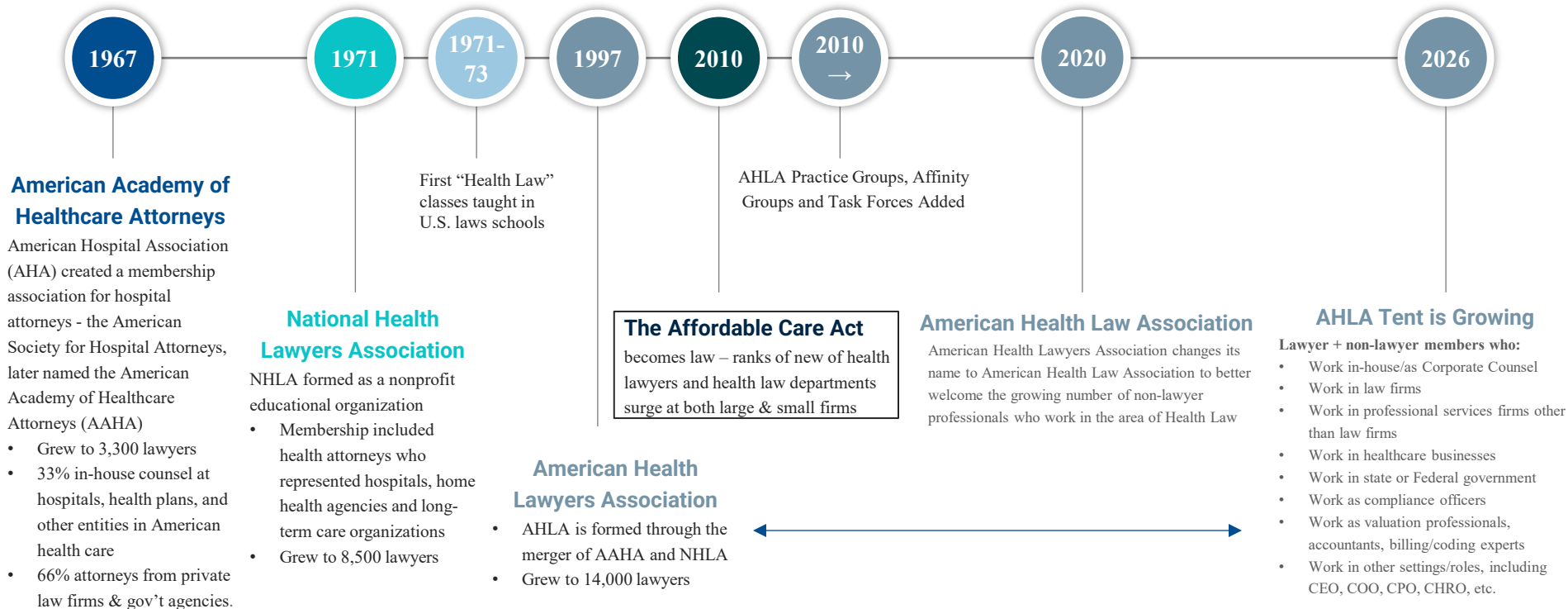
<https://www.americanbar.org/news/profile-legal-profession/legal-education/>

**Chart 2. Percentage of Associates Who are Women and People of Color at Law Firms, 1991-2023**



# AHLA History

## Statistics Over Time





# Statistics



## Law Firms and Alternative Services – AI View (AI Asked and Answered)

**1990s**: The "Big 5" accounting firms (e.g., Arthur Andersen, PWC) hired lawyers and entered the legal market to offer "one-stop shop" services. In response, U.S. and state bar regulators aggressively restricted multi-disciplinary practices (MDPs).

**2000s**: Accounting firms were forced to spin off their legal arms and U.S. law firms were largely confined to strict legal advising, separating their practices from consulting or lobbying.

**2010s**: Alternative Legal Services Providers (ALSPs) emerged in the market. U.S. law firms began launching captive subsidiaries or partnering with ALSPs to offer non-legal services- e.g., e-discovery, contract management, compliance consulting.

**2020s**: States such as Utah and Arizona allowed licensed non-lawyers to provide targeted legal services. Accounting firms aggressively re-entered the global and U.S. legal services space, employing lawyers and forming strategic alliances with other non-legal firms and law firms to offer “legal adjacent” services. Also, many law firms consolidated and achieved the scale to provide highly specialized legal services, while others broke apart to form highly specialized boutique firms.

**2026**: The ALSP market is a \$28.5 billion sector. There are many highly specialized law practices in firms of all sizes and types. AI is influencing practice styles and practice models.

For further insights, see the *Thomson Reuters ALSP 2025 Report or the Harvard Law School Center on the Legal Profession*

# Generational Perspective



## Study of Generational Differences Within U.S. Law Firms

**National Association for Law Placement survey (2019):** 2,473 lawyers

- 1,394 partners and 1,079 associates
- Broad cross-section of firms: 25% regional, 50% national, 25% Am Law 100 and 200 “economic elite”

### **Some Findings:**

- Most associates (59%) did not aspire to become partners at their current firms: only 33% of first- through third-year and 43% of fourth- through sixth-year associates aspired to become partner
- Of those who do not want to become partner, 20% wanted to go in-house; 35% did not know what they wanted to do in 10 years
- 84% of those who did not want to become partner would accept a lower paying job to work fewer hours (compared to 59% of those who wanted to become partner)
- The vast majority said it was important to find meaning in their work – across position, generation, gender
- Associates not aiming for partner were significantly less likely to agree that “I expect my work to be a central part of my life.”

Source: *Multiple Generations in Law Firms Working Together*

# Personal Career Journeys





“A career path is rarely a path at all. A more interesting life is usually a more crooked, winding path of missteps, luck and vigorous work.”

~ Tom Freston



“Plans are nothing. Planning is everything”

(Variation: “Plans are worthless. Planning is everything.”)

~ Dwight D. Eisenhower

# The Roadmap



# Jody



**Went to law school because I  
didn't have anything better to do**

**Accidentally became a criminal lawyer**

**Realized I inherited the teaching gene**

**Accidentally became a health lawyer**

**Discovered teaching side gigs**

**Joined a law firm –  
something I thought I'd never do**

**Back to in-house practice –  
my happy place**

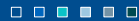
**Found the best teaching side gig ever!!**

Quit the best teaching side gig ever



**Starting my own teaching side gig**

# Andrea





“Be A Compound Professional”

**The Compound Professional**

Joseph S. Van de Bogart | Apr 29, 2026

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/compound-professional-joseph-s-van-de-bogart-tg04e>

Clinical  
Research  
Coordinator

Healthcare/  
Public/  
Health/  
Research  
Lawyer

LIPITOR

+

Physician  
Mentor +  
BU

(BUSL, BUSM,  
BUSPH)

Professional  
Consultant in  
Health  
Economics  
(Clinical Trials,  
Drug Pricing)

Student of  
Healthcare  
Systems  
(+ All Topics  
Medical/  
Clinical)

Student of  
Healthcare  
Economics  
(+ History and  
Government  
and Medicine-  
My Side  
Passions)

Accidental (and then Intentional):  
Healthcare Compensation/FMV and  
Governance Lawyer



- Accidental:
- Government Lawyer
  - Corporate Lawyer
  - Regulatory & Transactional Lawyer
  - Healthcare Fraud & Abuse Lawyer
  - Valuation and Fair Market Value Expert

Intentional/Wanna Be (But Not Really):

- Antitrust Lawyer

Very Intentional:

- Health Lawyer

Healthcare  
General  
Counsel/  
Corporate  
Counsel

Niche/  
Special  
Counsel

AHLA +  
BigLaw+  
FMV/  
Valuation  
Firm  
Expertise

Healthcare  
Valuation/  
FMV Firm

Accidental  
(And Then  
Intentional...)  
Corporate Law  
Firm Lawyer

Secondment to  
Corporate  
Body Politic/  
Government  
Agency/  
Hospital  
System

Married Healthcare Fraud Investigator/  
Task Force Officer (Mutual Learning by Osmosis)

Boutique → Big Law →  
Boutique → Big Law →  
Boutique

# Melissa





“...there are no wrong turns, only unexpected paths.”

~ Mark Nepo, *The Book of Awakening*



“Don’t go to law school unless you want to practice law.”

~ Attorneys I spoke with when vetting law school mid-career

# More...



# The Roadmap





# Educating and Connecting the Health Law Community

[americanhealthlaw.org](http://americanhealthlaw.org)



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