

CAN AN ADVANCED DEGREE INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF GETTING A COVETED ATTORNEY JOB?

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Charles A. Volkert is executive director of [Robert Half Legal](#), a premier legal staffing service specializing in the placement of attorneys, paralegals, legal administrators and other legal professionals with law firms and corporate legal departments. Based in Menlo Park, Calif., Robert Half Legal has offices in major North American and global markets and offers a [full suite of legal staffing and consulting solutions](#).

Although demand for specialized legal expertise is keeping hiring activity steady in the legal field, to land the attorney job of your choice you'll still need to stand out from other applicants. Obtaining an advanced degree or certification is one way to gain an advantage.

But is more education, after three years of law school, the right move for you? And what are the chances that having an LLM (Master of Laws) or MBA (Master of Business Administration) after your name, or an eDiscovery certification, will boost your legal career?

A recent [Robert Half Legal study](#) outlines how the legal profession continues to undergo major changes in terms of technology and workplace readiness. Candidates who adapt to this evolving environment can gain a competitive edge in their job search. Additional education enhances your credentials, gives you more job options and allows you to develop highly desirable areas of specialization.

LLM

An LLM from a first- or second-tier law school could put you in contention for a coveted attorney job and could be a good move if you want to be taken more seriously in a particular specialty or subspecialty. This intensive year of study can be compared to the residency period that medical students undergo after graduating, though the LLM experience is more theoretical than applied.

Different law schools have different areas of focus for their LLM programs, which normally last one year. Many U.S. schools tailor their LLM mainly for international students who wish to practice law in that country. Similarly, if you wish to practice law abroad, pursuing a LLM in the target country is a good way to immerse yourself in its legal system. But that's not the only focus. Some U.S. programs also offer JDs a concentration in a particular area, such as business law, international law, legal theory, health law, tax law or health law.

MBA

With both a JD and MBA, you have many more options than a candidate with only one or the other degree. This [joint degree](#) is especially valuable if you're seeking an attorney job as in-house counsel, because companies value advice from legal professionals who understand the world of business and finance. If your interests lie in corporate law, mergers and acquisitions, bankruptcies, financial regulations or entrepreneurship, a JD-MBA is a good move.

The two degrees also benefit your legal career if you want to get on the partner track at a law firm. You would be an asset as legal representation for business clients in cases involving white-collar crime, product liability, patent disputes and more. Litigation and business expertise are in high demand, according to the latest Robert Half Legal [research](#) on hiring trends. Among the lawyers surveyed, 32 percent said litigation will offer the most attorney job opportunities in the first half of 2016, especially insurance defense and commercial litigation. The second hottest practice area is expected to be general business/commercial law.

Certification in eDiscovery

Normally seen as a credential that a paralegal would pursue, eDiscovery certification is now becoming a competitive advantage for lawyers, too. While many law firms outsource electronic discovery to third-party providers, there is still a real need for in-house lawyers who understand the intricacies and can manage the process.

In addition, clients need trained attorneys to advise them on information governance and data management. There are also considerable ethical and malpractice concerns when preserving, collecting, storing and using electronic evidence. As the field becomes more complex, lawyers will likely need more than the occasional CLE course or webinar to stay current on [eDiscovery trends](#) and shifts.

With its cost and time demands, post-JD education is not for everyone. But it is definitely an avenue to consider if you want an edge over the competition. With an advanced degree or in-demand certification, you could be one step closer to the attorney job of your dreams.

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