THE ATTORNEY SEARCH GROUP

FOR PARTNERS CONSIDERING A MOVE

Emotional Phases of Partner Moves

A lateral move is usually treated as a business decision that happens to involve emotion. In practice it runs the other way. Nearly every partner travels the same nine phases, in the same order, and the hardest stretch arrives *after* the analysis is finished. **Knowing the sequence in advance is what keeps the low point from reading as a verdict.**

ARC		PHASE
Curiosity LISTEN · EXPLORE	01	**Curiosity** A call lands at the right moment. You weren't looking. You listen anyway — and what interests you is the idea, not yet the firm.
	02	**Exploration** You gather information quietly, telling yourself you're only curious. Nothing is owed to anyone at this stage, including yourself.
Thesis FORM · TEST	03	**Thesis Developed** *"I can reach my goals quicker and easier somewhere else."*
	04	**Thesis Validated** (or not) Meetings and real numbers either hold the thesis up or take it apart. A thesis that fails here has saved you the rest of the road.
Confidence CONFIRMATION	05	**Connection Points & Force Multipliers** You can see it — shared clients, a platform that carries weight you've been carrying alone. This is the most certain you will feel about the move.
Turmoil DOUBT · GRIEF	06	**Grieving the Move** Loyalty, history, the people who backed you early. The doubt arrives after the case is proven, not before, and it brings no new facts with it.
	07	**Acceptance of the Move** You stop arguing with yourself. The grief doesn't disappear — it just stops driving the decision.
Rest RESOLVE	08	**Commitment to the Move** Attention turns forward: clients, team, transition, first ninety days. The work of the move replaces the weight of it.
	09	**Relief & Excitement** The move stops being the risk and becomes the plan. Most partners report the low point looking smaller from here than it felt at the time.

The drop is not a warning. Your confidence will be highest at phase five, before anything is truly at stake, and lowest at phase six, once the decision is essentially made. That inversion catches almost everyone. It is not evidence that you're making a mistake — it is the ordinary cost of leaving something you spent years building, and it arrives on schedule whether the move is right or wrong. Expect it, and you can judge the opportunity on what you knew at phase four rather than on how you feel at phase six.

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NINE PHASES · WHAT TO EXPECT

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