



# ROADMAP

The Law Student's Guide to Meaningful Employment  
SECOND EDITION

---

NEIL W. HAMILTON

## SECTION I

# BUYING INTO THE ROADMAP

### A. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

What do you say when a potential employer says to you, “Tell me about a project that you have managed and what you learned from that experience; tell me specifically about how you handled a difficult team member in implementing the project?”<sup>2</sup> If you are like most law students, the slightest mention of “project management” or “difficult team member” makes you cringe, evoking painful memories of free-riding classmates. Once your discomfort passes, you either struggle to come up with a meaningful answer or fail to think of an experience demonstrating your project management and teamwork competencies. Would it surprise you to know that was supposed to be an easy question? What happens when you get a tricky question, such as, “What value do you bring beyond just technical legal skills to help our clients be successful?”<sup>3</sup>

The Roadmap process transforms this type of challenging question into an opportunity to differentiate yourself from other students. You will not need to wait for a specific question about the value you bring beyond technical legal skills to help legal employers and clients. Instead, you will understand what skills legal employers and clients need and will be able to explain how your strongest skills can help them succeed. You will be prepared with your best stories to demonstrate persuasive evidence of your strongest skills.

<sup>1</sup> Authored by Neil W. Hamilton and Carl J. L. Numrich.

<sup>2</sup> E-mail from Thomas E. Holloran, Senior Distinguished Fellow, The Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership in the Professions, former General Counsel and President, Medtronic Corp., to author (Dec. 17, 2014, 14:45 CST) (on file with author).

<sup>3</sup> E-mail from Dennis Monroe, Founder of Monroe, Moxness, Berg PA and former CEO of Parasole Restaurants, to author (Dec. 17, 2014, 11:58 CST) (on file with author).

Every law student desires meaningful employment to serve others well upon graduation from law school. The challenging legal job market does not necessarily mean legal employers are not hiring; in fact, the proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) for legal services is holding steady, but legal employers (and clients) are emphasizing additional experience and skills to add value for the clients.

In this new legal economy, law students will secure meaningful employment by differentiating themselves from other law students. The problem is “virtually all [law students] lack the skills to differentiate themselves.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore to become employable and to develop professionally, most law students need help determining how they can develop and present a unique package of capabilities and skills that appeal to legal employers and clients.

The most effective way for you as a law student to gain meaningful, long-term, JD-required or JD-preferred employment is to: (1) understand your own strengths and motivating interests; (2) understand the competencies desired by clients and legal employers; (3) discern how your strengths and motivating interests best meet the competencies that clients and employers want; (4) design your time in law school (and early years in practice) with the goal of developing those competencies; and (5) effectively communicate and demonstrate evidence of those competencies to potential employers.

To better enable law students to do this, some law schools are becoming more deliberate about helping each student develop and implement a plan for meaningful employment to serve others well. With the help of a comprehensive, curriculum-based employment-planning program, you can be more prepared, more persuasive, and more competitive when entering the legal employment market.

Although there are a number of available resources, including your law school’s career services office, you can successfully attain meaningful employment by committing yourself to the Roadmap steps, approaching them with purpose and total honesty, completing the self-assessments, and actively seeking feedback from others throughout the process. The following sections explain why *you* should buy into the Roadmap process.

During your three years in law school and throughout your entire career, the Roadmap process can empower you to take charge in telling the story of how you add value beyond just technical legal skills to help employers and clients.

## **B. How to Use the Roadmap**

The Roadmap will take you through the following steps to develop the skill you will need to obtain meaningful employment so that you can serve others well:

<sup>4</sup>William D. Henderson, *Blueprint for Change*, 40 PEPP. L. REV. 461, 494 (2013), available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2202823>.

### Assessment of Yourself

1. What are your strengths?
2. What are the characteristics of past work/service experience where you have found the most meaning and positive energy? Is there a particular group of people you have served from whom you have drawn the most positive energy in helping? What specific strengths and competencies were you using in this work or service?
3. To what degree have you taken ownership over your own continuous proactive professional development? Have you made the step from a student's passive mindset where you do what professors ask to proactive ownership to develop the competencies legal employers want?
4. Looking at the competencies that clients and legal employers want, how do you self-assess what your strongest competencies are? How do others who know your past work/service assess your strongest competencies?
5. How do your strengths from question 1, your motivating interests from question 2, and your strongest competencies from question 4 match up with the competencies that legal employers and clients want?

### Assessment of Your Most Promising Options for Employment

6. Can you create a tentative list of the most promising options for employment where you see the best match among your strengths, the characteristics of past work that have given you the most positive energy, and the competencies that legal employers want?
7. What is your value proposition to demonstrate to those employers that you can add value beyond the standard technical legal skills to help the employers' clients and the employers themselves to be more successful?
8. Step back and think creatively about the changing legal market and possible entrepreneurial responses to those changes. Could you demonstrate a particular strength that you have (or even a specific innovative idea) to help potential employers and clients be more successful in this changing legal market?

### Your Professional Development Plan

9. How do you plan to use your remaining time in law school to gain good experiences that will assist you in attaining your most promising options for meaningful employment so that you can confirm, eliminate, or add to the list of your most promising employment options? What metrics will you create to assess whether you are implementing your plan?
10. How do you plan to use your remaining time in law school, including the curriculum and all the other out-of-the-classroom experiences, most effectively to develop competencies supporting your value proposition?

11. What evidence are you collecting to demonstrate to potential employers your growth to the next stage of development at your strongest competencies? What evidence do you want to develop going forward?
12. How do you plan to develop long-term relationships based on trust with other lawyers, particularly senior lawyers and judges, who can give feedback on your employment plan and help you with experiences to implement it? Are you assessing your progress in implementing this plan?
13. What is the biggest fear or roadblock holding you back from any of the previous steps?

### Persuasive Communication

14. How will you most effectively communicate your value to potential employers on your list of most promising employment options?

Your work experience is an important factor to consider in the Roadmap process. There are three main categories that you may fall into: (1) students with modest work experience who do not yet have postgraduation employment, (2) students with substantial work experience who do not yet have postgraduation employment, and (3) students who already have postgraduation employment.

## 1. Students with Modest Work Experience Who Do Not Yet Have Postgraduation Employment

Many “traditional” law school students attend law school immediately after completing college and thereby have modest employment experience. Similarly, other students who have an extended period of time out of the workforce from common life occurrences, such as raising children or taking care of family members, may also identify most with this category. You will want to use the time you have left in law school most effectively to develop your skills toward meaningful employment to serve others well, but you do not have enough experience to know what type of employment will best fit your strengths and interests. The key is to start now. Use the Roadmap to make your best judgment regarding your motivating interests, your strongest competencies, and the types of legal employment that might be the best “fit” for you and offer the most promising employment options. From there you should seek experiences that will help you develop your strongest competencies and confirm, eliminate, or add employment options. Veteran lawyers can most effectively help you if your message is, “I have a plan for employment with these top-priority strengths and options that I am exploring, and I am looking for experience to build these strengths and explore these options. If you are willing, I would love your input on my plan.” Notice that you are focusing your message on wanting experience with certain transferable skills and competencies as discussed in parts C and D of this section rather than just on wanting experience in identified practice areas

like litigation  
lawyers that  
employers  
developme

## 2. Students Who Have Postgraduation Employment

While you  
to your si  
should no  
your empl  
giving you  
initiative a  
clear value  
for a speci

1. Should the  
the  
wh  
res  
en  
na  
ta
2. Do  
te  
th  
m  
Y  
la  
te  
tl  
d  
c
3. I  
e  
t  
v  
d
- 4.

3. The importance of project management and collaboration in teams with clients and nonlawyer, lower-cost providers to increase efficiency and reduce costs; and
4. The usefulness of coproduction of legal services with the client to better understand and define client needs and meet them at lower cost.

What specific steps should you consider including in your Roadmap professional development plan (and in communicating it to employers)?

1. If your law school offers a course on market changes affecting legal services, especially the interface of machine intelligence and human intelligence, take it. Strongly consider attending continuing legal education (CLE) courses on this topic. This effort becomes part of your story.
2. Read “Project Management Skills: How Law Students Can Learn and Implement the Skills Employers Value” and “The Basics of Teamwork” in section III. In your Roadmap professional development plan, seek experiences that help you to grow toward later stages of these key competencies. Seek experiences where senior lawyers evaluate these competencies and you receive feedback.
3. Be intentional in your interactions (see “Building Relationships Based on Trust through Networking” in section III) with experienced lawyers to inquire about how the business model of the employer works. How does the employer (whether private firm, government, nonprofit, etc.) cover the costs of delivering the legal services? What are the challenges they face? What solutions are they adopting?
4. Remember that your creation, implementation, and regular reconsideration and revision of your Roadmap professional development plan demonstrates your ongoing commitment to professional development toward the competencies that employers and clients say are needed in changing legal services markets.

## 2. Entrepreneurial Mindset

A major theme in changing markets for legal services is the need for lawyers to think more like an entrepreneur. To reach your goal of meaningful postgraduation employment, you need to realize that you are essentially the owner or entrepreneur of a service business providing competencies that legal employers and clients need.

The following discussion of the entrepreneurial process includes an additional lens through which to view the Roadmap process specifically and the legal services market generally. Take the time to study the small-business plan outline presented here and consider how it relates to your task of finding meaningful employment. Having an entrepreneurial-like Roadmap plan sends a unique and powerful message to potential employers. It is evidence of ongoing initiative and commitment to professional development to meet employer and client needs.

### *a. Introduction*

What does it mean to be an entrepreneur? One definition of the word characterizes an *entrepreneur* as “one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise.”<sup>15</sup> A person who sells his or her professional services to help others is essentially an entrepreneur of a service business. As a law student, you are preparing for a career in which you sell professional services. You are, in essence, starting a service business.

When deciding to go to law school, you probably researched different law schools, different areas of the law, and maybe even explored various law firms or departments. After some reflection about the benefits, costs, and risks, you decided to attend law school. You decided to organize, manage, and assume the risks of entering a service business over a career. When you decided to come to law school, you acted on a belief that your small service business could fill a need in the market. You took a substantial financial risk in the hope of one day making a living and making a difference—you were enterprising. Enrolling in law school was entrepreneurial.

### *b. Embracing an Entrepreneurial Mindset*

You might be asking “So what?” When you ask a potential employer for employment, you are asking for more than a job; you are asking the employer to invest in you. While your ultimate goal as a law student is to develop a “small business” providing services for which others will pay over the course of an entire career, for a first job, you simply need to secure an employer’s investment. This investment requires the employer to allocate significant resources to your training and development as an aspiring attorney. For the potential employer to invest in you, the employer must believe that its investment will yield a positive return. This is true of all employers, not just law firms. In many ways, seeking employment from a potential employer parallels an entrepreneur’s pitch of a start-up business to investors.

To prove that a business venture is viable, the entrepreneur must develop a plan for the creation, growth, differentiation, direction, and management of that business. Without a well-thought-out plan, it is unlikely that potential investors will believe their investment will yield a positive return. Similarly, legal employers seek individuals in whom they can make a viable investment—they seek individuals who will add value and help them to be successful with their vision.

The most successful entrepreneurs are those who recognize some need in the market and seek to fill that need. It is the desire to actively fulfill others’ needs, rather than stand by and wait for others to take the initiative, that defines entrepreneurship. The law students with the most success in searching for legal employment are those who understand the needs of potential employers and clients and how the student can meet those needs. “Help Wanted: Legal Employers Seek New Lawyers

<sup>15</sup> *Entrepreneur*, MERRIAM-WEBSTER, available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entrepreneur> (last visited July 10, 2017).



with Professional Competencies” of page 17 analyzes competencies that different legal employers are seeking and expecting. Employers in the new legal economy are looking for graduates who understand how to add value beyond just technical skills in helping a client. There is an unmet need in the legal employment market: legal employers are hungry for law students who are more than legal technicians. But most law students are unable to communicate to potential employers anything more than their comprehension of the law and aptitude at legal analysis, research, and basic written and oral communication skills. These students are unable to differentiate themselves from all other law students. So how are you going to meet employers’ and clients’ needs and help them to be successful?

### *c. The Entrepreneurial Process*

In order to differentiate yourself, you must develop tangible skills like “[i]nitiat[ing] and maintain[ing] strong work and team relationships.”<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, legal education often fails to provide law students the opportunity to develop these tangible professional competencies. By purposefully planning your time in law school with the goal of gaining demonstrable experience in these other professional competencies, you are more likely to be able to persuasively communicate how you might add value to an employer’s operation. You are becoming an entrepreneur who organizes and manages the development of your professional services business.

#### *i. The First Step: Create a Unique Service*

The first thing a successful entrepreneur does is “create a product or service that makes the world a better place.”<sup>17</sup> In your case, the world that you need to better is that of legal employers and clients, and the service is you. The most prominent problem in the employment prospects of law students is that “virtually all [law students] lack the skills to differentiate themselves.”<sup>18</sup> They provide the same service—the basic technical legal skills of a first-year lawyer. In order to differentiate yourself from the masses, it is essential to consider how you can package the strongest skills you have into a unique product for potential employers. You need a persuasive story to convince employers that you will make them more successful and make their lives easier.

#### *ii. The Second Step: Define Your Mission*

In recent years, the business world has been plagued by deceit, fraud, and corruption. To guard against contagious corruption, entrepreneurs should

<sup>16</sup> See Neil W. Hamilton, Most Common Values, Virtues, Capacities and Skills from Analysis of the Associate Evaluation Forms of the 14 Largest Minnesota Law Firms (Apr. 15, 2013) (unpublished manuscript) (on file with author).

<sup>17</sup> GUY KAWASAKI, THE ART OF THE START: THE TIME-TESTED, BATTLE-HARDENED GUIDE FOR ANYONE STARTING ANYTHING 3–4 (2004).

<sup>18</sup> Henderson, *Blueprint*, *supra* note 4, at 494.



consider their role in the market, the values expected of players in that market, and their personal value system. Entrepreneurs must then define a mission or “mantra” of excellence and care for the stakeholders on which to base all aspects of their businesses in order to ensure the integrity of all of the competing value systems.<sup>19</sup> This will create trustworthiness in the services, which is one of the most important competencies legal employers want and is explored in “Trustworthiness: Building Lasting Professional Relationships” in section III.

*iii. The Third Step: Seek Experiences to Differentiate Yourself*

Every business starts with an idea, but an idea alone does not constitute a business. In order to move from an idea to a business, the first step is to “[s]tart creating and delivering your product or service.”<sup>20</sup> Right now you think you want to be a lawyer and have taken the necessary steps to get the ball rolling. You will study the competencies presented in section III of this book and will have a pretty good sense of what employers want from you. In the first entrepreneurial step, you thought about what your unique service is. Now it is time to begin gathering experiences that will help you develop the services to differentiate yourself from your peers. The best way to do this is to make a list of your strongest skills and a list of the competencies desired by the employers you hope to work for someday. Where do they match up best? Then develop a corresponding list of experiences you have had and that you might complete in order to properly demonstrate your development of those several strongest competencies. For example, if teamwork is one of your strongest competencies, look for employers who want teamwork skills. What are your experiences prior to law school that involve teamwork? What did you learn about teamwork from those experiences? How can you build on those experiences in law school to learn more about teamwork and move toward a later developmental stage? Can you provide evidence demonstrating a later stage of teamwork skills?

*iv. The Fourth Step: Develop a Written Plan*

For the entrepreneur, the fourth step is to create a sustainable business model and plan that tells the entrepreneur’s story.<sup>21</sup> Much like an entrepreneur needing to create a plan to prove to investors that a venture is viable, you should create a written plan to prove your viability to employers. Ultimately, you need to create and communicate a comprehensive story of who you are and what you can do for an employer. Developing professional competency is the first step, but competency is useless if you are unable to effectively communicate it in your search for employment. You must tell your “story.” Essentially, you are using

<sup>19</sup> John M. Darley, *The Cognitive and Social Psychology of Contagious Organizational Corruption*, 70 BROOK. L. REV. 1177 (2004).

<sup>20</sup> KAWASAKI, *supra* note 17, at 3–4.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

your developing skills of persuasion for yourself. This is the Roadmap plan you will create in section II that tells your story of value to employers of interest to you. As you gain experience, test your top employment options and develop your strongest competencies; keep an entrepreneurial mindset as you revisit and revise your Roadmap plan to better meet employer and client needs.

### **3. Uncertainty about Career Direction, the Reality of Substantial Early Career Mobility, and the Importance of Transferable Skills**

You are an entrepreneur seeking meaningful postgraduation employment in changing markets. You may have substantial uncertainty about: (1) the type of people/organizations you want to serve; (2) the type of legal or other work that you want to do and are best able to do for these people/organizations (where do your strengths best fit their needs?); and (3) the type of employers with whom you want a job. In addition, you are generally aware that over a career, markets and employers may change, and you may experience some job mobility.

This is where the Roadmap professional development planning process is critical. It is a tool to help you use your time in both law school and the early years of your career to effectively gain experience that will bring you increasing confidence in your answers to the topics above, especially where you have uncertainty. The key first step is to realize that at various points in law school—based on your best judgment at that time—you need to have a list of the most promising employment options you want to explore and your best strengths or skills for those employers. You then should seek experiences to help confirm, eliminate, or add an option and to develop your strongest skills. This step is not meant to limit your options but instead to teach you to focus on being strategic and efficient in exploring promising employment options at any given time in law school. For example, veteran lawyers can be helpful in answering your three questions if you give them the employment options you are most interested in exploring. But if you say, “I don’t know what I want to do with my degree” or “I really don’t know anything that distinguishes me,” a veteran lawyer will struggle to help you. You need to move from option maximization and toward option prioritization. Then seek experiences to test your employment options and to develop your strengths to a later stage of competence.

Reaching option prioritization and testing your top employment options can be accomplished through an iterative loop of gaining experience at your most promising options and then through further reflection and discernment based on those experiences. “Iterative” means that you keep repeating the following steps to sort through and test your most promising employment options and your strengths to help a legal employer. These are the Roadmap steps in section II:

1. Identify your strengths.
2. Identify work/service characteristics that give you meaning and positive energy.

time being distributed fairly, or is there disproportionate participation among team members? An agreed-upon short, but dedicated, team meeting addressing these subjects not only can help teams identify room for improvement but can also serve as an extra “stick,” motivating team members to uphold standards lest they be held accountable and brought to task at the meetings.

This is just one example of many in-class or assigned team projects that law students will have to grapple with in their three years of law school. Each student has to make a conscious choice about how he or she approaches team projects. Many students will view team projects begrudgingly, resenting that they are being asked to be accountable for other students. They will go through the motions and suffer through teamwork as best they can. However, for students interested in their own professional development, they can use these group assignments as a testing ground to practice good teamwork skills to prepare for the professional world. Students can add these team exercises to their ongoing law school portfolios and use the assessment tools discussed throughout this chapter, which are all accessible electronically, to construct evidence of teamwork competencies.

## 6. Conclusion

Most of the new competencies—teamwork, project management, good judgment, good listening—that empirical research has shown employers look for in new hires can be learned and applied in conjunction with one another. Many projects involve teams, and most teamwork relies on good judgment and good listening. For students who decide that it is in their interest to practice and hone these core competencies of professionalism, being active and motivated participants in team assignments is a good place to start. See table 5 in section I to determine which stage of teamwork development you are at and to examine what steps you can take to advance toward the next developmental stage.

Now that you have read “The Basics of Teamwork,” complete the Reflection Dashboard at <http://ambar.org/roadmap> to develop a better understanding of what developmental stage you are at and what steps you will take to grow to the next stage. Recall that the assessment tools discussed throughout this chapter are also available through the link just provided.

## J. Commitment to the Employing Organization<sup>211</sup>

First impressions at a job can be very sticky. Unfortunately, many bright, perfectly capable new lawyers get off to a rocky start simply because they do not appreciate the professional environment within most legal offices and the expectations of those they are working for. With that in mind, the following tips will help you to transition from being an excellent law student to a “go-to” lawyer (or a “must-hire”

<sup>211</sup> Authored by Benjamin Carpenter.

summer associate)—starting on day one. First, ten general principles to guide your interactions with those you work for are presented, followed by nuts-and-bolts advice for receiving and turning in work, then some final thoughts regarding the longer view.

## 1. Ten Core Principles

### a. *Rule 1: The Golden Rule—Make Your Colleagues' Lives Easier*

People want to work with those who make their lives easier. Whenever you are unsure about how or whether to do something, ask yourself, what will make my colleague's life easier? If you can consistently add value for the person you are working for, in ways big and small, you will get more work. The day will come when people are working for you, but that time is not during the first year or two of your legal career. Your initial focus should be on serving those you are working for. Everything that follows flows from this fundamental principle.<sup>212</sup>

### b. *Rule 2: You Are Not as Busy as the Person You Are Working For*

The classic myth among new lawyers is that life is easier for their employers and supervisors. It isn't (not for many years, at least). Few appreciate the various demands established lawyers have to juggle, both in and out of work. They constantly have other responsibilities pulling at them, demanding their time. They may be up throughout the night with infants or sick children, up early to get children ready for school or daycare, picking their children up after work, attending (or missing) school functions, taking care of an elderly parent, and so forth. Indeed, when lawyers leave at 6:00 p.m., rarely is their day done. They likely left "early" so they could see their kids for a couple of hours (which really means feeding, changing, bathing, reading to them, etc.) and then will work late after the kids are in bed. They, literally, may not have ten minutes to themselves all day, day after day. For most established lawyers, working late affects their family life—and causes significant stress in the home. As a student or new associate, when you work late, it likely will affect only you. In addition, more senior lawyers have pressure to bring in new clients, to manage numerous existing clients, and (in many offices) to serve on community boards, bar association committees, and so forth—and to *supervise you*. On top of that, they *still* will be billing the same number of—if not more—hours than you. Never complain to them about how busy you are. You will not get their sympathy, but you will annoy them. And even if you are in fact busier, keep this in mind: they have paid their dues, and now they expect you to. Fair or not, that's a fact.

A similar pitfall that summer law clerks fall into is that they feel "too busy" to attend firm social functions. While you should never miss a deadline to go to a company baseball game, you should plan to attend as many events both during

<sup>212</sup> For ways of practicing this as a law student, see "Dedication and Responsiveness to Clients," section III.F.4 ("Treat Professors as Your Client").

the day and in the evening as possible. Many high-level associates make time to attend these events, and you should as well.

*c. Rule 3: Your First Client Is Your Employer*

As a new lawyer, you will rely primarily on your colleagues for your first projects. Many new lawyers complain about doing nonbillable work or that they are just “behind the scenes.” This is the wrong attitude. As a first-year lawyer, the person who assigns you work *is your client*. If you prove yourself, soon enough, you will be working directly with the “real” clients. Even if asked to work on a nonbillable matter or to prepare materials for a CLE your colleague will be presenting, treat it with the same attention and care you would for a paying client. Again, refer to rule 1.

*d. Rule 4: Never Turn Down a Project*

Just as you would never tell a good client that you are too busy to help, never do so to your employer or supervisor (see rules 1, 2, and 3). If you *truly* are so busy that you cannot meet the deadline (and not because of an evening cooking class), discuss whether there is any room to reshuffle the priority list for the various projects on your plate. But keep in mind that *someone* has to do the project. If your supervisor is up at 2:00 a.m. writing a brief because you were “too busy,” this will not make life easier. And you may soon find yourself not busy at all. *Never, never* turn down a project because you don’t “want” to do it. Again, somebody has to do the work—and if you don’t want to, you can be sure your employer or supervisor doesn’t.

*e. Rule 5: Never Miss a Deadline*

Few things will aggravate a busy supervisor more than a late assignment. Never simply miss a deadline. You will have less resilient colleagues who complain about the grave injustice of a supervisor’s “false” deadlines. But you won’t, because you understand this: *there is no such thing as a false deadline*. Your project may be a building block for someone else’s next step. Or a supervisor may have only a small window available to review your work, even though it may not be filed until a bit later. But the reason doesn’t matter; the supervisor is your client, and you don’t set the deadlines. If a project is taking longer than expected, you find yourself being pulled in too many directions, or something intervenes beyond your control, tell the attorney immediately and well in advance of the deadline. The supervisor may extend the deadline, find another lawyer who can help, or reduce the scope of the project. Don’t just leave the problem with the supervisor, though; tell your supervisor what you can do instead, then deliver. And make sure this does not become a pattern for you.<sup>213</sup>

<sup>213</sup> As you seek to effectively manage your time to complete a project, you may want to consider the skills and practices discussed in section III.K on “Project Management Skills: How Law Students Can Learn and Implement the Skills Employers Want.”

*f. Rule 6: Understand Your Role*

In most instances, your role as a new lawyer is to provide support to your supervisors. You may do this by researching the law for them, writing first drafts of briefs, preparing documents for depositions they will conduct, assisting with document review or due diligence, and in dozens of other ways. Through these experiences, you gain experience and exhibit your ability and potential to the supervisors. Always understand, though, that the supervisor is ultimately responsible for the client relationship. Do the absolute best job you can, but if a supervisor rejects your suggestions, heavily edits your work, or accepts credit from a client for work you have done, do not take it personally. Do not sulk. There may have been other considerations at play that you were unaware of (or, just perhaps, your suggestions were a bit off-base). In any event, learn from the experience and find a way to continue to contribute.

*g. Rule 7: Accept Responsibility*

Eventually, you will make a mistake. Everybody does. When this happens, supervisors will be much more interested in how you respond than in why it happened. Frankly, they likely will not care why it happened; they are more interested in whether you are mature, honest, and self-confident enough to take responsibility. In fact, many employers look specifically for this trait, resiliency, during the interview process. If you take responsibility for your mistakes—including mistakes of those whom you supervise—almost any mistake will be forgiven. If you assign blame elsewhere, you will lose others' respect and confidence. Two caveats: (1) take responsibility and apologize, but do not grovel—it does not come across as professional—and (2) you will be expected to *learn* from your mistakes; don't make the same mistake twice.<sup>214</sup>

*h. Rule 8: Be Responsive*

For better or worse, you are now connected almost 24 hours a day through e-mail and smartphones. If you will be out of your office for an extended period of time (30 minutes or more), be sure your assistant knows where you will be and how to reach you. Return all voicemail and e-mail messages promptly. Some employers have a policy that all messages must be returned within an hour. If your employer does not, adopt that as your own policy. Even if you respond simply to inform your supervisor that you are headed to a meeting and will get back to him or her later, your supervisor will appreciate the response. It will ease anxiety. It will make life easier.

*i. Rule 9: Keep Client and Employer Confidences*

Do not discuss your employer's business with people outside of your office. Do not discuss client business with anyone who doesn't need to know (even within

<sup>214</sup> See "Trustworthiness: Building Lasting Professional Relationships" in section III.

the office). Be sensitive to your surroundings, particularly in bathrooms, elevators, at lunch, on a plane, and so forth. It is your duty to protect your clients' and your employer's confidences. This is the one area where the failure to do so just once could cost you your job. This is not discretionary.

*j. Rule 10: Treat Everyone with Respect*

The original Golden Rule. Although the previous advice refers only to your relationship with supervisors and employers, this advice applies to anyone with whom you work. Keep in mind that even lawyers one year your senior may be asked to evaluate you, and they will be your supervisors when you are eligible for promotion. And treat *all* assistants with respect, not just those who may work for you. You can learn a lot about how the office works from staff, and their support (or lack thereof) can make or break you. Moreover, many assistants have worked for years, if not decades, with certain lawyers. If you disrespect an assistant, his or her supervisor—and all the other assistants—will hear about it. And, most importantly, of course, it's just the right thing to do.

## 2. Getting Work: Nuts and Bolts

*a. Receiving Projects*

**Take notes and ask questions.** Always bring a pad and paper to every meeting. (In fact, take one with you anytime you leave your office.) Listen carefully and take extensive notes. If you are unclear about anything, ask questions until you are sure. Be persistent. It is okay if you don't understand something at first. It is not okay, however, to go back the next day with questions because you neglected to clarify or write something down. This will not make your supervisor's life easier.<sup>215</sup> If you do need to ask additional questions, be sure to do your initial research first. This will avoid the possibility of needing to go to your supervisor multiple times with questions.

**Understand the exact issue.** Before you leave the meeting, restate precisely the issue you are being asked to research. Do this even if you feel it is clear to you. Often, upon hearing again what they have asked you to do, supervisors will realize they were not completely clear and revise their initial instructions. If you do not ask, however, they will not recall later that they were unclear. Rather, they will think you were not listening carefully.

**Understand the scope.** Be sure you understand the scope of your project. Is the supervisor looking for a full-blown memo for the file, a simple answer in an e-mail, or (often) both? Can you use Lexis or Westlaw? Should you research the law only in one state, or should you look at outside jurisdictions as well? Is there a specific form or template the supervisor would like you to start from (depending on the project)? These questions make you

<sup>215</sup>This will involve essential listening skills, which are discussed in "Listen to Persuade: How Attentiveness Leads to Value" in section III.



look thoughtful and detail oriented—and may prevent a supervisor from having to write off your time.

**Get a deadline.** Do not leave until you have a clear deadline. If the supervisor doesn't give you one, ask for one. If your supervisor says "sometime next week," clarify if that means by next Friday. In your supervisor's mind, "sometime next week" may mean midweek. Again, if you do not ask for specificity, the supervisor may remember the conversation differently days later. You will not annoy a supervisor by seeking a clear deadline. Instead, he or she will appreciate that you are being detail-oriented and responsible. He or she may have more confidence in you. Now, go and deliver.

#### *b. During Projects*

**Take ownership of a project.** For your first few assignments, you likely will be asked to help with a small piece of a larger project. It may be reviewing a contract, summarizing deposition transcripts, or writing one section of a larger brief. While doing that piece as well as you can, demonstrate an interest in the larger project. Ask how that piece fits into the bigger picture. Ask what the next steps will be. Take the initiative to review other parts of the file (for instance, the legal and correspondence spindles) to get a sense of the client's backstory and history with the office. (Note: Consider this an investment in yourself—do not bill for work you are not asked to do!)

**Provide updates.** Keep your supervisors updated as to the status of the projects you are doing for them. In this regard, no news is not good news. Long stretches with no communication may lead supervisors to assume you haven't made progress (and may create anxiety for them). That said, respect their time and update them appropriately. While a weekly update may be reassuring, daily updates may become annoying. Find out what each supervisor prefers (daily, weekly, e-mails, voicemails, etc.). Importantly, the purpose of this is to reassure the supervisor, not to get affirmation that you are doing a good job. Do not ask the supervisor to review what you've done so far—this will make you look like you need your hand held. I once did, and the supervisor simply asked, "Can you swim on your own yet?" Point taken. You don't ever want a supervisor to ask you that.

**Be proactive.** If, however, for any reason the project is not going according to plan, address it immediately with the supervisor. For instance, if the project is taking longer than anticipated or if you've reached a fork in the road on strategy or research-wise (that you cannot resolve yourself), seek guidance well before the deadline.

**Prepare for meetings.** If you need to (or are asked to) meet with a supervisor during a project, prepare for that meeting—no matter how informal it may seem. Show the supervisor that you respect his or her time. Research any issues that are mentioned, and write down your questions in advance. This won't make you appear dull, but conscientious. Leave your laptop in

your office (unless essential for the meeting); come prepared to engage in a discussion. Be prepared to explain where you have looked and why you have not been able to find the answer already. Bring copies of statutes or cases for both of you if you may be discussing them. Whenever possible, bring proposed solutions, not just problems.

**Adopt your working style to that of the supervisors you work with.** Your job is to work well with your supervisors; it is not their job to work well with you. Supervisor may have individual preferences about how they prefer to communicate (what medium and frequency), how they like to receive work, and so forth. Find out what those preferences are from other lawyers in the office, and take notes about each supervisor's preferences after you have worked with him or her.

### *c. Handing in Projects*

**Hand the project to the supervisor.** Whenever possible, hand your work product to the supervisor in person and ask if he or she would like to discuss your conclusions (and be prepared to do so!). Do not simply e-mail the supervisor your work, leave it in the inbox, or ask your assistant to give it to the supervisor. Handing your work to the supervisor shows respect, maturity, and confidence, and it provides you an opportunity for further interaction. Then, follow up with an e-mail so that the supervisor has it in electronic format as well. Now your supervisor can access it from anywhere if he or she desires to. If the supervisor is out of the office, wait until he or she returns. If you cannot, e-mail it *and* leave a hard copy on his or her chair with a brief note offering to discuss the document at your supervisor's convenience. If you are out of the office, e-mail it to her or him and ask your assistant to print out a copy and provide it to the supervisor.

**Provide complete materials.** If your memorandum or brief relies on cases or statutes, provide copies of those with your memorandum, along with the KeyCite summary for each case (preferably clean copies, with key aspects highlighted, clipped to the back of the memorandum or brief). If the supervisor would like to review a source you have cited, this will make life easier. Even if he or she does not, it will demonstrate that you are detail oriented and respect your supervisor's time. Few others will take this extra step. But you will—and you will stand out because of it.

**Never turn in a draft.** You may be asked to prepare a draft, or told that "a draft is fine." This just means "be prepared to be edited." It does not mean expectations are lower. Everything you submit to a supervisor should be well organized, accurate, properly formatted, and typo-free and should include proper citations. Draft pleadings should include the caption. Draft letters should include a heading, date, direct dial, and so forth. Take pride in your work product. Act as though you expect it to go out as is, even if you know it will not.

#### d. Follow Up

**Always ask “What’s next?”** When you turn the project in, always ask if there is anything else you can do. Even if you never want to touch the project again, ask the question. It will reflect that you view yourself as part of the team.<sup>216</sup> Finally, a week or so later, follow up one last time to confirm that nothing else has come up relating to the project that the supervisor would like your help with.

**Seek feedback.** You should seek feedback for every major project you do. If you don’t receive any feedback after a reasonable time, don’t just wait passively; take the initiative to seek it out. This expresses humility and a desire to improve. Respect that the supervisor is busy, though, and may not have the time to provide feedback. Ask once, but don’t pester. Seek out constructive criticism, too, not just compliments. And when you do get feedback, handle it gracefully. Remember that perception is reality; if a supervisor thinks you did it wrong, don’t debate the supervisor. Rather, focus on what you can do next time to prevent that perception.

**Let supervisors know your interests.** If you particularly enjoyed a project or the subject matter that you worked on, let the supervisor know about your enthusiasm. They may think of you for similar projects that come up.

**Build a portfolio of your work.** As you are working, you are also growing your skillset and writing ability. When permissible, keep copies of your completed projects for self-reflection. Some firms also let you keep redacted copies of work as writing samples. Be sure to know firm policy on the issue before starting your record keeping.

### 3. Final Thoughts

#### a. Roll Up Your Sleeves

The only way to learn the law is to read the law. A secondary source may help you understand it, but *you* must roll up your sleeves, reread cases, reread statutes, reread regulations, get out a pencil, and take notes as you do so. If it still isn’t clear, reread it all again. There is no substitute for this. Don’t expect anybody else to do this work for you, and don’t expect anybody else to swoop in and fix a problem for you. You are a professional now. Act like one. Dress like one. Treat others like one. Be self-sufficient, responsible, and reliable.

#### b. Be Enthusiastic!

Always show enthusiasm for even the mundane and menial tasks, as well as the big, exciting projects. People are drawn to those who have enthusiasm. Exhibit pride in your place at the office by diving into projects and striving to do even

<sup>216</sup> For the skills and perspectives necessary for a successful team member, see “The Basics of Teamwork” in section III.

seemingly trivial tasks to the best of your ability. Establish a reputation for being a team player who is not afraid to do whatever needs to get done. This is how you get the opportunity to work on great projects.

*c. Be Open-Minded*

Some projects on the surface may seem mundane, uninteresting, or outside your comfort zone. Treat those projects with the same zeal as any other work, and you may be pleasantly surprised. Mundane projects can open new doors and expose you to areas you may have not otherwise explored.

*d. Build Genuine Relationships*

Understand that the relationships you have with those you work with will determine your job satisfaction more than the work itself. Law, ultimately, is about people—those you serve and those you work with. Ask questions of those around you (and not just attorneys!) about their work, their career, their experiences, their families, and their own goals. Show interest in them, not just in what they can do for you, and they will do the same.

*e. Be Vulnerable*

There are no shortcuts to becoming an effective, respected lawyer. Ultimately, the only way to improve significantly and become comfortable is through experience. If you want to get better at taking depositions, you have to take more depositions. If you want to become more effective at negotiating contracts, you have to negotiate contracts. *Seek out these experiences; do not avoid them.* And don't let any bumps in the road deter you. You will not be perfect at first, and neither were the supervisors you work for. Strive to be thorough, and prepare, prepare, prepare—but don't beat yourself up over mistakes. Learn from them and look forward to your next opportunity. Draw inspiration from the great Teddy Roosevelt, who urged us all to dare greatly over a century ago:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; . . . Who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly[.]<sup>217</sup>

*f. Take the Long View*

Finally, you may find that your first job is not what you had hoped for. Indeed, few people today retire from the same employer they start their career with.

<sup>217</sup> President Theodore Roosevelt Jr., Speech in Paris, France, Citizen in a Republic (Apr. 23, 1910); see BRENE BROWN, *DARING GREATLY* 1 (Penguin 2012).

Don't let this affect your effort. Approach your work as though it is your dream job. Build strong relationships, acquire as much experience as possible, seek out more responsibility, and set yourself up for the future. You never know when your break may come—which client may offer you an in-house position, which supervisor may leave and take you with her or him, or which employer may have an opening. The single most effective thing you can do to set yourself up for future opportunities is to do outstanding work today. Indeed, that is the only thing you can control—focus on that, find value in doing your work well, and your break will come.<sup>218</sup>

Now that you have read “Commitment to the Employing Organization,” complete the Reflection Dashboard at <http://ambar.org/roadmap> to develop a better understanding of what developmental stage you are at and what steps you will take to grow to the next stage.

## K. Building Relationships Based on Trust through Networking<sup>219</sup>

“Networking is the formation of professional, ideally long-term, relationships of trust with others; it is a critical skill for a student to develop in order to be an effective lawyer.”<sup>220</sup> Too often the term “networking” is thought of as “a giant cocktail party with inexpensive wine and hundreds of people I don’t know all looking for a job.”<sup>221</sup> So to emphasize the strategy of developing long-term relationships through networking, we will instead use the term “relationship building.” You should recognize, however, that many people will still refer to the process as “networking.”

Relationship building is the single most effective, underutilized, and misunderstood tool for developing one’s skill as an effective lawyer and gaining meaningful professional employment. Some students’ reluctance to engage in the practice of networking stems largely from a lack of clarity regarding what networking *is*. It is not seeking out immediate offers of employment, manipulating others into assisting you, or making small talk with people in whom you are really not interested and won’t ever talk to again. Rather, networking is the formation of professional, strategic relationships that are mutually beneficial and ideally long term.

<sup>218</sup> A large part of “taking the long view” is seeing your work as part of ongoing professional development in which you consider yourself as a “project.” For more information on managing the project of your professional development, see “Lessons from Entrepreneurship” in section I.E and “Initiative, Drive, Work Ethic, and Commitment to Professional Development” in section III.

<sup>219</sup> Authored by Neil W. Hamilton, Colin Seaborg, and Robert Maloney.

<sup>220</sup> E-mail from Steven Tourek, Senior Vice President & Gen. Counsel, Marvin Windows and Doors, to author (Dec. 21, 2014, 13:48 CST) (on file with author).

<sup>221</sup> JAMES CITRIN, *THE CAREER PLAYBOOK: ESSENTIAL ADVICE FOR TODAY’S ASPIRING YOUNG PROFESSIONAL* 47 (2015).