

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON | SCHOOL OF LAW

WASHINGTON LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

WASHINGTON STATE BAR ASSOCIATION



2022 WLI Fellows

Alizeh Bhojani

Micah Bobo

Nyssa Chopra

Andre Dayani

Andrew Fuller

Ashley Gomez

Darrah Hinton

David Morales

Sarah Rieko Pendleton

Nico Quintana

Jackee Walker

# What We Wished We Had Known

Perspectives from Underrepresented Attorneys

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Washington Leadership Institute  
2022 Community Service Project

# Foreword

*It's not about supplication; it's about power. It's not about asking, it's about demanding. It's not about convincing those who are currently in power, it's about changing the very face of power itself.*

**- Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw**

The legal community has disproportionate power and impact on the shape and character of the broader communities in which we all live our lives. While some progress has been made in diversifying the legal community, it is still by-and-large dominated by cis-gendered heteronormative white male power wielders. The United States, and thereby Washington, is governed by systems that we know to be racist, sexist, and exclusionary. The Washington Leadership Institute was established in 2004 by the first Black President of the Washington State Bar Association, Ronald Ward, to help young and diverse attorneys accelerate the development of their careers and their capacity for inclusive and ethical leadership. The goal is unequivocal: to challenge these prejudicial power structures by intentionally raising up the next generation of the legal community to, sometimes quite literally, change the very face of power itself.

In furtherance of that goal, the incoming fellows of the Washington Leadership Institute are challenged to develop a group project that benefits Washington's legal community. After coming together to discuss project ideas, we quickly realized that we wanted to leverage our own personal diverse experiences and share our stories and insights with new attorneys and incoming law students, especially those who come from marginalized communities. Our goal was to produce something that would be practically useful and provide real and meaningful insights—unvarnished truths—about our own struggles and accomplishments as minority members of the Bar.

This guide could only have been produced through the collaboration of the diverse strengths, insights, and the collective wisdom of a newly formed community: WLI's fellowship class of 2022. In developing this guide—in coming together to manifest our goal—we leveraged our diversity and trusted one another with our personal stories and our vulnerabilities. We hope that the stories, tips, and lessons contained herein provide useful and relevant information that helps prepare you for entering our profession. But we also hope that this guide serves to remind you that you are not alone, and that community is around you to be built, improved upon, and relied on.



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# **I. Law School**



# Nico Quintana

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Nico is a transgender, non-binary, Indigenous and Latinx defense attorney and abolitionist. Nico specializes in criminal legal defense work and is the Lead Attorney at Lavender Rights Project (LRP). LRP elevates the power, autonomy, and leadership of the Black intersex & gender diverse community through intersectional legal and social services. Prior to coming to LRP, Nico was a Public Defender at King County and provided legal defense representation to people accused of crimes. Before working as a Public Defender, Nico was a policy advocate and community organizer with Basic Rights Oregon and the DC Trans Coalition. Nico loves martial arts, cooking and being out in nature with his Great Dane, Bodica.



# **What I Wish I Had Known Before and After Law School**

**Author: Nico Quintana**

As a transgender, non-binary, Indigenous and Latinx abolitionist and activist from a low-income background, I went to law school so I could support BIPOC trans social justice movements. I am now a lead attorney at a black trans femme led advocacy and legal services organization. My journey to where I am today was an extremely painful and challenging one. I'm hoping your journey won't be as painful and I want to arm you with some wisdom to help you thrive through law school and beyond.

## **Why you should go to law school.**

Our movements and BIPOC communities need attorneys who are by and of community to lead and push for social equity and represent people in an affirming and fierce way. Currently BIPOC and LGBTQ+ attorneys make up a fraction of the legal profession. (See American Bar Association's [2020 Profile of the Legal Profession](#).)

Despite the lack of lawyers from marginalized backgrounds, some BIPOC students are being discouraged from becoming lawyers. So many BIPOC and LGBTQ+ lawyers tried to convince me at the time to not go to law school. They cited oppression, lack of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ people in the law and the fierce barriers I would face as someone who struggles with traditional systems of education and work. I want to tell you that while law school and the legal profession can be extremely challenging and painful for marginalized communities to navigate, you should consider going anyway. It is important however to understand the challenges ahead and how to support yourself through what will likely be a difficult time.

## **How to get into law school by asking for help and being true to who you are.**

It is important to learn how to lean into asking for help from people who have come before you. I do not have lawyers in my family, and it took me a while to get into law school due to not knowing the process. It is important to ask for help from BIPOC attorneys with your application plan and process. Applying to law school isn't a sprint and it is essential you play to your strengths and know yourself before you begin applying. I applied to schools that were traditional BIPOC schools and/or had a public service program with loan forgiveness. Thinking back, it would have been helpful to have had an older BIPOC mentor to help me with my essays and application process. It also would have been helpful to get more support with the LSAT process.

Additionally, being true to who you are can help you make the case for why you belong in law school and in the legal profession. Being honest about who you are and what you have

been through is a great way to help you get into law school and help you remember why you are there once you get in.

## **You can endure and thrive law school.**

Getting through law school can help you become an amazing attorney for your community and remembering this can help you get through law school. Law school was hard for me for very different reasons others usually say. It wasn't the reading, or the work or even the exams- it was the pervasiveness of racism, transphobia, superiority and colonialism in the traditional legal education system and lack of support for marginalized students. These forces try and mold law students to fit into a nice box that can be marketed and used for profit. If you don't fit the mold, then law school and the legal profession can be excruciatingly painful and challenging. This is because law school and the legal profession was not made or designed for BIPOC and other marginalized people. We are the ones that need to ensure the legal profession changes.

## **How to weather being a young attorney.**

In my second year of law school an older black woman attorney told me once that “lawyers eat their young” – and I was going to have a hard time in the law. Thinking back on this, while she may not be wrong, this is terrifying advice. What I think she meant by this is sometimes the legal profession may want to see you fail as someone who represents change, equity, diversity and different thinking.

With this in mind, it can help you understand how important it is to build trusting and supportive relationships with colleagues, mentors and community. You will need this to help you grow and succeed in your life and career. It is also essential to remember who you are, where you come from and where you want to go. Finding power in your background, community and strengths will help you navigate the demands of law school and the legal profession. This will help you when you feel like you are lost or don't belong.

My last piece of wisdom for applying to law school and becoming a young attorney is do not “fake it until you make it”. Do not try to become someone you are not and always be authentic to who you are. You are needed just as you are and changing yourself to fit a mold will not help anyone. Instead of fake it until you make it – change it until you make it. Consider transforming and changing your institutions and environments to support you and people like you better. If we do this, more people will struggle less and our profession will be more just and equitable. You can and will thrive and I look forward to meeting you one day.

# Sarah Rieko Pendleton



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Sarah Pendleton joined the Washington State Supreme Court Clerk's Office as Deputy Clerk on July 1, 2021. She was previously the Chief of Contracts and Legal Services for the Department of Social and Health Services, where she managed a team of 10 attorneys and non-attorneys responsible for managing 80,000 contracts.

Sarah is a proud graduate of both the University of Washington Jackson School of International Studies and Seattle University School of Law. She also received certificates of completion in legal studies from Science Po Paris and Universite Paris Ouest Nan-terre, La Defense, in France. She completed an externship in a francophone chambers at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and began her legal career at an American law firm in Paris, France.

Sarah and her husband Josh stay busy with their energetic and fun-loving kids, Lilah (4) and Jordy (1). Sarah grew up in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle and currently resides in Puyallup.





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Alizeh Bhojani is a human rights advocate and policy attorney. She received her J.D. and LL.M in Sustainable International Development from the University of Washington School of Law, and a B.A. in International Studies and French, also from the University of Washington. She is barred in Washington and New York. Alizeh was born in Karachi, Pakistan and moved to Washington state when she was ten. She is passionate about the promise and achievement of human rights, stemming partly through her own experiences as an immigrant.

Alizeh is committed to fighting for immigrant rights at the local, state, and federal level. Since joining OneAmerica as the Immigration Policy Manager in 2020, she fought for and won an immigrant relief fund totaling \$340 million for undocumented workers in Washington state. Prior to joining OneAmerica, Alizeh spent almost three years working for the Center for Reproductive Rights advocating for access to assisted reproduction using a human rights lens while centering the experiences of those most impacted by infertility.



# What I Wish I Had Known About Financing Law School

**Authors: Sarah Pendleton and Alizeh Bhojani**

Every fellow in our WLI class agrees that money is something that 99% of people need to think about before getting out of law school, or better yet, before applying to go to law school. Just the cost of tuition can be daunting, even before factoring in the exorbitant prices of law school textbooks, extracurriculars, and general cost of living. In law school, especially during your 1L year, you are encouraged not to work and to focus yourself completely on school. Even in your 2L and 3L years you may have no choice but to intern with little or even no pay.

## **1. Public Service Loan Forgiveness for Government and Public Service Lawyers**

If the retirement plan and robust health care benefits are not persuasive enough to you (see Chapter on “What I Wish I Had Known About Public Service”), the other drool-worthy benefit of working as an attorney for the government (either State or Federal) is the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program. PSLF is a federal program that was signed into law in 2007. PSLF is a program that allows anyone working full-time for the government/public sector to have their federal loans forgiven after 10 years of service and who have made 120 “qualified payments” on their loan. There is no limit to how much they will forgive. Although the types of payment plans that qualify for the PSLF program was greatly expanded by President Biden in early 2022, in general, “qualified payments” means payments made through the income-driven repayment plans (IDR) where your monthly payment is calculated based on how much you earn.

Contact your student loan service company for more details.

The PSLF program had a rocky start, with many people’s loans not being forgiven in the first few years of people becoming eligible. Applying for this loan forgiveness program requires understanding all your loans, knowing what time of repayment program you’re on, and whether your employer qualifies.<sup>1</sup>

Some tips to maximize your PSLF:

- Know what loans qualify – as stated above, **ONLY** direct federal loans qualify for this type of forgiveness. Private loans are not included.
- Certify your employer every year if you can. This saves you from tracking down ten years of employers when you have made your 120 qualifying payments and is an annual check ensuring your employer is eligible for the program.

<sup>1</sup> Helpful tips from the Dept. of Education available here: <https://studentaid.gov/articles/5-tips-pslf-success>.

- Consolidate your loans. This turns multiple payments into one monthly lump sum payment but once again, ensure you know the different conditions on your various loans and how they will be impacted by debt consolidation.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAPs)**

When considering law schools, research your school's loan repayment assistance policies. LRAPs provide financial aid to law school graduates who are working in the public interest or government sectors or are in another low-pay legal field. The assistance is provided in the form of a conditional interest-free loan that is forgiven once the recipient fulfills the terms of the loan. The money from the loan goes towards the regular monthly payments a borrower makes towards their student loans. The conditions can range from income caps (you have to make under a certain amount to be able to benefit from the program) to geographical and job sector limitations.

The American Bar Association is a good starting point for researching schools that provide LRAPs to their graduates.<sup>3</sup> LRAPs are another way to ease the burden of law school debt while employed in the public sector, and one which many students are completely unaware of.

Ultimately, navigating financial concerns and paying for law school can be daunting tasks, especially if you are interested in working in the public sector. While we have highlighted some tools that can be helpful for navigating your financial future, managing your debt is an incredibly important and personal choice that you must think about before even entering law school.

<sup>2</sup> Equal Justice Works has incredible resources for navigating your debts and understanding different types of loans: <https://www.equaljusticeworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/A-Guide-to-Managing-Your-Student-Debt-Ebook.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/center-pro-bono/resources/directory\\_of\\_law\\_school\\_public\\_interest\\_pro\\_bono\\_programs/definitions/pi\\_lrap/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/center-pro-bono/resources/directory_of_law_school_public_interest_pro_bono_programs/definitions/pi_lrap/)



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David Morales practices in Yakima Washington where he works with farmworker communities. Since 2012 David has worked as a Staff Attorney for the Northwest Justice Project's Farmworker Unit, which provides free legal services to low income farm workers.

In the nine years that he has been an attorney his work has included a wide variety of legal advocacy tools. For the last five years he has represented the Shady Acres Homeowners Association to preserve affordable housing for 50 Latino families in Ellensburg. Work for this community has ranged from affirmative fair housing litigation in Federal Court to working with the community to vision a future for their community. David has also represented men and women who have been sexually harassed in the workplace before the HRC, the EEOC, and Federal Courts. David has also litigated in both State and Federal Court on behalf of local farmworkers who were retaliated against for asserting their rights. Since the start of COVID-19 he has worked with groups of workers to improve their working conditions and safety in the workplace, including those who have been retaliated against because of concerted activity. David's legal work has also included academic reports with Whitman College, projects to monitor immigration enforcement in Central Washington, and the improvement of jury representation for Latinos.

Community engagement has always been a major part of the work done by David. Since 2013 he has been involved with the United Way of Central Washington and La Casa Hogar and has served on the board of both organizations. In 2013 he also started volunteering for the One America citizenship clinic and continues to do so. In 2014 he was appointed to the Commission on Hispanic Affairs and served as its co-chair between 2017 and 2019. Work on the commission included advocating for laws that benefit the Latino population of Washington, and holding governmental actors accountable when there are systemic failures that affect the Latino population. Starting in 2016 he has been involved in the Yakima Immigrant Response Network and the Washington Immigrant Solidary Network. Furthermore, David served on the board of Latino Progress from 2015-2019. In 2016 David was appointed to the City of Yakima's Ethics and Equal Rights Committee and in 2020 he was appointed to the City of Yakima's Truth and Reconciliation Committee. Today, David continues to volunteer widely and serves on the board of Front and Centered, an environmental justice organization, and the Latina/o Bar Association of Washington where he coordinates the Eastern Washington Clinics.

Originally from El Monte/Azusa California, David lives in Yakima, Washington with his small dogs and engages in landscape photography as a hobby. David received his BA from UC Berkeley in 2008 and law degree from Columbia University in 2012.



# What I Wish I Had Known About Internships

**Author: David Morales**

## **1. Introduction**

You are in law school for a very important reason. You are here to help your community, find happiness, and do important work. Finding the right organization and practice area is a critical passage and this can only be done through experience at actual organizations doing the work you are interested in.

For example, I became a lawyer to help immigrants. Over the years, between undergraduate and law school, I ended up working for eight different immigrant serving non-profits across the country. It is true that the models of service, the theories of change, and the law practiced is different between organizations, but the biggest difference is in the culture. Some organizations are healthy; others are not. Burnout is common. Low pay is the norm. At some organizations, people take out their frustration on their colleagues. I ultimately chose to work for an organization in the opposite side of the country because they had built a culture of sustainability, a community with those they serve, and were on their way to becoming a leader in benefits and compensation.

## **2. Why is it valuable to take on legal internships during and before law school?**

You are going to spend a quarter to a third of your life at work. While we all have dreams of doing what we love, most lawyers struggle with their jobs in unhealthy ways. The little known secret is that you do not have to hate your job. If you spend your law school years in a serious effort to find what you love, whom you admire, and the clients you want to serve, you will walk out of law school on a path towards holistic success. Even if you already know you want to engage in public defense or sports-law, internships can help you narrow the healthiest organizations to join after law school.

## **3. How do I find an internship?**

Ask yourself, “Why did I decide to come to law school?” Be real with yourself. This is not about what your parents, peers, or mentors want for you but about what you genuinely want for your future. Who do you want to be in ten years? Have you met such a person? Are there any organization that you’ve always wanted to be part of? If so, go and find out if they have an internship program or use some groundwork to ask for an internship. Develop a list of organizations you would like to apply to and apply to around 10 organizations. This will usually result in several offers.

Internship programs are the most common ways to find a job during the summer. The first place to look will be the Simplicity website of your law schools’ career services offices. Law school administrators will translate emailed openings into a Simplicity posting and

place it. If the school's people know you are interested in a particular job or career path they may email you the opening directly. If you do not see it on simplify, you can go directly to the webpage of the organization you would like to intern for. The vast majority of internships are internally listed like this. There are also websites such as idealist that often times capture a large portion of nonprofit and government openings. Other common methods are LinkedIn, Indeed, and Simplyhired. Local minority bar associations also receive a steady trickle of information on internships for law students and publish postings of organizations looking for non-traditional interns. Casting a broad net is important because organizations are often much more willing to let someone who does not have experience in a particular field intern there rather than trying to make a switch later in your career.

Many organizations do not list internships, or formally look for interns because they are not near law schools or do not have a formal summer intern program. This does not mean that the organization is not an option for you. Call directly. Email. Ask people at networking events. This simple, but uncommon, method works for countless law students every year to break into some of the most niche areas of law.

You will need to prepare a packet of materials to send to every organization. This includes a resume, a cover letter and a writing sample. Your school will have resources in how to put this packet together. Send PDF, not word documents. Have a friend and/or a school official review your materials before you send them. Further, you should polish your online presence (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram) to look professional and approachable. When you hear from an organization respond within 24 hours.

#### **4. What about clinics and externships?**

While internships are focused around experiential learning by working at another entity, a clinic or an externship is a more formalized educational arrangement with a law school. Some externships are exactly like internships except that they occur during the school year and you receive school credit for them. For example, the Laurel Rubin Externship Advocacy Project is available for 18 academic credits at the University of Washington, Seattle University and the University of Idaho. Other externships are more closely linked to school curriculum and include research, publication, and legal education courses.

A "clinic" is an on campus practicum program. Almost all law schools have a handful of clinic based out of their university built around public interest service. These can range from focusing on the incarcerated to international human rights. You will need to check with your school about what clinics are offered, the requirements and expectations. Often a clinic will be led by a prominent expert in the field or experienced Attorney who will give you real guidance in how to handle your work.

Personal Story. I often tell people that the most important work I have ever done in the legal field was in helping to free Scott Lewis, an innocent man. In my second year of law school, I joined a legal clinic focused on prisoner's rights. When I started, I knew nothing whatsoever about criminal law as a legal practice and less about habeas corpus challenges

to convictions, most other students were just like me. Between us, we put together the pieces to overturn the conviction who was framed for a 1990 double murder by a corrupt police department.

## **5. How do I find funding for internships?**

The vast majority of organizations do not fund you for an internship. This is what makes an internship distinct from a “summer clerkship,” where you are paid by a law firm to perform work while they consider your potential as a future associate. Basically you are volunteering for the experience. This makes funding an important issue to consider.

Some organizations do have funding for interns. For example, the Southern Poverty Law Center takes on paid interns. Other organizations have limited funding and can fund only a few interns per year. At the Northwest Justice Project in Seattle there is funding for a Medical Legal Partnership intern and a King County Housing Unit intern. Further, the Laurel Rubin Farmworker Justice Project pays for summer internships at Columbia Legal Services, the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, and the Northwest Justice Project’s farmworker unit. If you are interested in public interest, attending the Northwest Public Service Career Fair is necessary. It usually occurs at Seattle University and Lewis and Clark College in the Spring. There you can find about paid internships at organizations and government institutions across the region.

Despite these examples, the vast majority of internships occur without funding from the host organization. The most common source of funding is your law school. Some law schools guarantee a base level of funding for first year and second year students, others only first year, and others only on a limited basis. Students particularly interested in international human rights can find programs and funding specifically to do that work. You will need to research your schools’ public interest resources to find out what is available. Usually the earlier you obtain a job and apply for funding the more likely that your school will choose your application. You can also receive funding from your local bar associations, and nonprofit foundations. For example, the Tamer Fund for Social Ventures provides seed money for projects focused on the environment. There are also law firms, such as Venable LLP, and Morrison and Foerster that provide public interest funding if you plan to serve a particular community.

## **6. What should I be looking to get out of an internship?**

If you engage in deliberate planning around your internship, you should be able to make lifelong connections and gain valuable information about your practice area. Further, you will walk out with a new writing sample and a knowledge about a body of law you will not have previously known.

An internship is not your summer break. Be on time, check when people arrive and leave. Most places now have an hourly expectation around 35-45 hours per week. Your absences should be as few as possible. Your work attire, email etiquette and conduct should speak well of you and match the organization you are working for. Take a note pad to meetings and trips.

An internship is more than just the four walls of your job. It is an opportunity to learn about a new area, a new practice of law, and an organization. Make the effort to network while you are engaged in your internship. This can include attending bar association functions in your city, lunches with co-workers, conferences of like-minded attorneys, and events hosted by your school. Carry business cards with your contact information and graduating year. You never know when an opportunity to network will come up so always be prepared. If someone makes time to meet with you and talk about career paths, send a paper thank you note.

A legal writing sample is a cornerstone of the summer internship. Whether it is a legal memo, a brief, a legal motion, or a research report, you will be asked to create a completely new writing product during your internship. Embrace it. This is your opportunity to show off your research, writing and analytical skills. Work hard on it because this document will likely be the sample you send to potential employers for your first job. If you are not given such a project, or given feedback, ask for it. You should time your research so that you can have a second or third draft done by the end of your internship.

If you have done the internship correctly, you will make a lasting professional impression that will benefit you for years to come. Your colleagues will write recommendation letters and answer phone calls about your professional competence. Maybe you will have expanded your network and formed a new path in your career and life.



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Andrew was born and raised in Jacksonville, Florida where he promptly dropped out of high school on his 18th birthday. Determined to chart his own course, Andrew moved to New York City and graduated from New York University with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and Composition with a minor emphasis in Music History. He completed his legal education at the University of Washington School of Law, part of the class of 2016.

Andrew has practiced in both civil and criminal courtrooms, having previously served as a county prosecutor and public defender in his now-hometown, Tacoma. Andrew is now a Seattle-Tacoma based plaintiff's attorney who practices in civil litigation with a particular focus on personal injury and consumer protection work as a partner at Thornton Mostul Fuller, PLLC.

Andrew firmly believes that *all* attorneys serve as stewards of the public good. He is driven by a practice of service to his clients and his community. And he is determined to leave both clients and community in a better position than he found them, especially for other LGBTQ+ identifying persons.

Beyond the practice of law, Andrew is a dedicated cat dad, a prolific baker, and winter sport enthusiast. Andrew splits his free time between local tabletop gaming groups and carving lines in the snow up at Crystal Mountain with his snowboard or skis.



# What I Wish I Had Known About Law School Competitions

**Author: Andrew Fuller**

## **Introduction**

Law school competitions are part of the experience that I think most people know about, but rarely think about until the moment of confrontation. The purpose of this section of this guide is to provide some context and insight into the competitions experience that I had at the University of Washington from 2013 to 2016 as an overweight white gay male student.

On reflection, many of the challenges of my experience were self-imposed and the unfortunate result of negative social conditioning, like my self-consciousness about the “effeminate”<sup>1</sup> pitch of my voice. Those things I identify and discuss below are challenges that are an inseparable mix of systematic oppressions and the baggage (see, *traumas*) that my own lived experiences have left with me. I am confident that aspects of my experience will have little to no bearing on what you, young intrepid going-against-the-advice-of-the-lawyers-you-know soon-to-be law student—so take this with the appropriately sized grain of salt and a couple fingers of whiskey. I hope, if nothing else, you are encouraged to lean in.

## **Personal Background and Baggage**

It is important to me that if you’re reading this you appreciate how truly hard it is to relate to someone else’s experience, even if we share some or many life experiences. To that end, it would be impossible to even feel the shadow of my experience without understanding some of my personal baggage.

From a young age I came off as an effeminate, loquacious, fat, precocious little gay boy – and that was pretty obvious to the majority of people around me, even though I never directly discussed it. I come from a religious southern family—groans are appropriate here. To this day, for a lot of reasons, I still do not discuss my sexuality with my father but love him more than anyone other than myself in the world. I grew up in a weird state of happily repressed duality, where I accepted from a very young age that I liked boys and was bi or gay, but where I also accepted that I did not want to “come out of the closet” to my family. My family did not tease me or really discuss it – my love for classical music, musicals, fine food, and my complete disinterest in girls, were eccentricities. My approach was to simply not discuss it – if I was ever asked, I would be honest.

<sup>1</sup> Whatever the hell *that* means.

This background is relevant because it's the traumatic source of my own anxiety surrounding my voice and how I present. Growing up I got a lot of looks and teasing about my voice, especially when I would get excited about something. The pitch of my voice raises when I get worked up or excited about things in some contexts and settings. Unfortunately, I started to associate that with being the equivalent of my waiving a rainbow flag in public. Being directly confronted about my sexuality made me deeply uncomfortable and provoked feelings of self-hate for years: "they could tell just based on my voice or the way I present?"

I **hope** that this sounds super bizarre to you, reader, as my impression is that the younger generations are both kinder and more open about these sorts of things. But I am also sure that you have your own baggage that you're bringing with you. What follows is simply an explanation of the three types of competitions that I participated in during law school and how I felt at the time and in retrospect.

## **The Law School Competitions**

### **Mock Trial**

Mock trials are simulated civil or criminal jury trials. The primary skills are the same as for real-life trial attorneys: charisma, storytelling, emotional persuasion, confidence. You'll be assigned a case file with both a Plaintiff/State and Defendant position. The competitions typically require that you are prepared to argue **both** sides of the case and which side you argue will change as the competition progresses. You'll have to draft and practice opening and closing statements, prepare witnesses to testify and be cross examined, and develop your own cross examination questions for your opponents' witnesses.

We're here for the drama and a show! If you took theater in school, you're probably going to slay—work. If you can convincingly argue for something that you absolutely do not believe to be the truth, welcome to the world of the law – you're going to do great things kid. In my opinion, competitions are one of the only parts of law school that is meaningful preparation for the reality of law practice. However, introverts and gunners will correctly identify that competitions are not obligatory and not graded. BUT! Mock trial is fun... if you're not like *the majority of law students* who are (surprisingly) absolutely terrified of public speaking. That's right, *the extroverts are **excited***.

At UW Law, mock trial is a team exercise done in pairs. Every student who wants to compete must find a partner. Already—stress. Despite having a background in some mock trial and debate, I seriously debated about where or not I wanted to compete. I wouldn't have minded rising or falling on my own flaws, merits, and skills. But I knew coming into law school that the law is, typically, a conservative and slow to progress field and I was instantly worried about judging. In my competition experience in Florida, more than one judge made comments, and deducted points, from my presentation based on the "tone" of my voice. I did not want to hurt someone else's chances if we happened to get a

prejudicial judge. However, one of my classmates, and now good friends, was determined he wanted to compete with him.

The classmate in question, Ben Nelson, was a 6'3 high-and-tight haircut Marine who was still actively managing soldiers while in law school. Ben looks like a ken doll who went to marine training and later to war in Iraq: boyishly and youthfully soft and aggressively hardened at the same time. Frankly, I was a little bewildered. And because I wasn't particularly comfortable discussing my sexuality—I knew that he knew—but we didn't discuss it and I did not raise my concerns with him about my voice and the possibility of prejudice to our scores. And I felt really bad about that failure of full disclosure all the way up to the point at which we won the 1L mock trial competition. I know I had no obligation to tell him, but it was ever-present in my mind while competing and I put in time practicing controlling my vocal tone before our matches.

In preparing to write this, I asked Ben to lunch so I could ask him about his perceptions of me and why he pursued me as a partner. Ben Nelson is a superlative person, but even knowing that it truly surprised me that neither my voice nor my sexuality even entered his mind while considering who to partner with. I could not see the traits about myself that Ben could see and appreciate. In fact, part of my initial appeal, apparently, was that I was loud—my voice carried. So, while I was hand wringing and exhausting emotional energy over one aspect of my presentation (mostly my voice and the fit of my clothes), Ben was excited by the amount of practice that I demanded we do together. Ben was excited about my aggressive critiques of our arguments and the way we made them. Ben was excited about the fact that, in reality, we were winning.

### **Moot Court**

Moot Court competitions is a simulated closed-universe civil or criminal appellate case. In mock trial, you're being judged on your jury trial practice and arguments. In moot court, your score comes partly from your written brief and partly from your oral presentation to a panel of judges. This isn't Storytime -- the primary skills for a successful appellate attorney are: excellent writing and understanding of the rules, organization, logical persuasion, knowledge of the cases, preparedness, and ability to answer questions on your feet.

Moot court is the more intellectual cousin of mock trial. If you were in debate club in school, or enjoy debate style public speaking, this may be your niche. Like mock trial, moot court is done in teams of two. Unlike mock trial, moot court has two components: the brief and the oral argument. You and your partner will likely have two different issues that need to be argued as both Plaintiff and Defendant. It is common to split the issues between you and "take point" one for both the brief drafting and oral argument components. Mock trial can be successfully done on the fly – moot court *requires* more time and investment purely due to the written component. Teaming up for moot court requires considering the balance between a potential teammates' traditional litigation skills that cross apply to all public speaking against their writing ability, work ethic, and intellectual capacity.

The brief is all about nitpicking and granular detail—NERDY WRITERS, ASSEMBLE. Are you the type of person that can spot whether a period is italicized after an *Id* citation? Do you mind breaking out a ruler to double-check that your formatting and margins meet bluebook standards? Have former classmates been weirded out by your obsessive document formatting ticks, generally? **This is your moment – seize it!** More seriously, the briefing component is predominately about time and effort. Your arguments need to be well organized and well supported with logical analogies to the case provided in the closed universe.

Appellate oral argument is substantially different from a mock trial presentation. The panel of judges will have read your written materials (*usually*) and it is unlikely you'll be able to read off a pre-written script. You'll need to be prepared to make an opening statement quickly and start addressing your argument. Unlike mock trial, the panel of judges will likely interrupt you to ask probing questions about the weaknesses of your argument to judge your ability to rebut their questions on your feet. The goal of mock trial is to sway lay person jurors to emotionally invest in your story and to find in your favor. The goal of moot court, conversely, is to intellectually persuade an expert and prepared appellate panel that your understanding and interpretation of the relevant statutes and case law as applied to your facts is the most correct.

In general, appellate oral argument is viewed as more “conservative” than mock trial because of its formality. And that formality and reputation stoked my anxieties about how I presented both in my clothing and oral argument. Despite having won mock trial earlier in the year, in retrospect I spent just as much time and energy worrying about the same things that were mostly out of my control. In fact, one of the only reasons that I went through with competing *at all* was because my law school essentially made it compulsory: either you partnered up and participated or you had to draft a brief on your own and give an oral argument to a panel of professors on your own.

I was lucky enough to again be sought out by a partner – another cis hetero white male, Tyler Lichter. Unlike Ben, I did express some of my concerns and anxieties to Tyler about prejudice and the judging. Luckily for me, Tyler was both determined to work with me and did not care even a little bit if we lost. In fact, I suspect that Tyler would have preferred that we did not do well as it reduced the time commitment and pressure involved in competing. But, if that's the case, he shouldn't have been such an excellent and diligent partner – we won best brief, predominantly off the back of his detail-oriented nature. And since the scoring is a split between the written component and the oral argument, Tyler and I made it to the semifinals together. And, gratifyingly, we only lost to the team who ended up winning the competition that year.

### **Contract Negotiation**

Contract negotiation competition simulates representing a client's interests in a simulated negotiation. Where mock trial and moot court are win/lose adversarial oral presentations, contract negotiation is an observed conversation, negotiation, with another team. You are scored based on how well you represented your client's positions

and how well you achieved their goals. The primary skills for successful negotiators are: creative flexibility, preparedness, organization, on your feet problem solving, and charisma.

Contract negotiation is, arguably, the least intimidating. If you do not like public speaking but still want to experience competing, this might be the competition for you. If you think you want to be a transactional attorney or a contract attorney, this might be your ideal competition. The goal or ideal for this competition is to see someone who can balance the need to achieve specific results with the ability to maintain relationships with opposing parties. This also makes it the most amorphous to judge and it can be difficult to self-assess.

Ben (my mock trial partner mentioned *supra*) and I teamed up again for this competition. Because of the nature of this competition, had significantly fewer concerns or anxieties about the judging for some reason despite the fact that all the same concerns existed. I think it was because the format of this competition feels like having a spirited conversation or argument with classmates that someone happens to be observing rather than any kind of formal oral presentation. There is a lot of back and forth involved. Unlike my previous competition experiences, by the end of the second round Ben and I were out of the competition. Our feedback from the judge was that we were overly aggressive in achieving our goals and didn't have great optics for a long-term relationship with the partner organization we were supposed to have been negotiating the contract with—oops. Ben's now a prosecutor and I'm a civil trial attorney; can't be good at everything!

## What I Wish I'd Known Takeaways

### **Self-Consciousness and Self-Doubt are (Probably...Hopefully) Your Biggest Enemy—Lean In**

It's cliché, but it's true: you will never be able to please everyone and not everyone will like you. Are there judges whose scoring is influenced by their own prejudices? Almost certainly. And that continues to be true in real life practice. I can tell you as a trial attorney I think the judge and juries' prejudices and preconceived notions about me in every case. **But**, despite my legitimate and rational concerns, I've found the most success comes from leaning into myself rather than leaning away or putting on a mask. Not being yourself, and dimming your own shine, is not only exhausting but self-destructive.

The thrust of my message is to not let your own insecurities, self-doubts, and fears of prejudice keep you from leaning in and maximizing the opportunities in front of you. You have doubtlessly worked so hard and gotten so far despite whatever baggage you are carrying. That isn't fair—and I think we all hope it will not always be true—but seriously, **screw the haters until then**. Life is too short, and the world is too big, to let small minds and small people keep you from leaning in to the things you are good at and the things you want. Maybe you'll end up sweeping the competition.



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Ashley is an Assistant Attorney general in the Consumer Protection Division of the Washington State Attorney General's Office. In this role, she assists the State in investigating and prosecuting businesses that engage in unfair and deceptive practices affecting Washington consumers. Prior to her role at the Attorney General's Office, Ashley was an associate attorney with Schroeter Goldmark & Bender, where her practice focused primarily on plaintiff-side employment law and sexual assault litigation. Ashley started her legal career in Washington practicing family law at DuBois Cary Law Group in Seattle.

Originally from the San Diego, California area, Ashley obtained two Bachelor of Arts degrees at U.C. Davis and a juris doctorate at Lewis & Clark Law School. While in law school, Ashley served on the board of Lewis & Clark's Environmental Law Review and was a regional semifinalist on the appellate moot court team. She also worked for the appellate division of the Oregon Department of Justice and for Justice Rebecca Duncan at the Oregon Court of Appeals.

In addition to her practice, Ashley volunteers with the Latina/o Bar Association, taking part in their monthly legal clinics and serving on the Judicial Evaluation Committee. She has also volunteered with the Unemployment Law Project and has co-edited a chapter of the Washington Family Law Deskbook.



# What I Wish I Knew About Law Review

**Author: Ashley Gomez**

## **1. What is law review, exactly?**

Law review is the law school's journal of articles on current issues in the law and other topics the school thinks readers might find useful. The law review executive committee, which is made up of students and supervised by a professor, selects articles for publication. The goal of publishing these articles is to increase recognition for the school and for the published authors.

## **2. What does it mean to be on law review?**

As a 2L on law review, you will likely be a "cite-checker." This means that you will periodically be assigned a range of citations in a forthcoming law review article. Your job will be to methodically go through the citations and accompanying text, correcting any grammatical or citation errors and making sure that the text is understandable. The number of citations you are assigned will typically vary based on the length of the article and the citations themselves.

As a 3L on law review, you will have the opportunity to run for election to the editorial board. A position on the board can mean more responsibility, since you will be overseeing other members of the law review, but it also means you can help influence the articles chosen. The good news is that more responsibility doesn't always mean more time—a lot of positions on law review will be less time-consuming than cite-checking.

## **3. Why is law review such a big deal?**

Technically, law review is a big deal because you become an expert on Bluebook citations, and it can improve your legal writing since you spend so much time reading and editing legal articles. But, is this really that helpful in practice? It depends.

It's true that being on law review will make you an expert on the nitty-gritty of legal writing, like knowing the difference between an em-dash and an en-dash and learning what words like ante and supra mean, and when to use them. This can be useful in writing legal briefs, especially if you work for a firm, appellate court, or other position that takes legal writing seriously.

The real answer is that law review is a big deal because it looks good on a resume. Like so many other parts of the legal profession, law review is a tradition that many practitioners have been taught to take very seriously. The actual use of your law review skills can be negligible, but the gold star on your resume is real.

#### **4. What is the time commitment?**

As a 2L cite checker, the time commitment can be significant. Expect law review to feel like an additional class you are taking, but aren't receiving credits for. If you're planning to really load up on your 2L year so you can have a lighter 3L year for internships, you might want to think hard about adding a law review commitment. While law review can look good on your resume, it's not going to help much if your grades suffered as a result.

3L year varies widely based on the role you choose. You'll have the opportunity to continue your time commitment and go for a role on the executive committee, or you can reduce the commitment somewhat and just oversee 2L cite checkers. Either way, there will continue to be some kind of commitment. Also, few people will tell you this—but it's okay to only be on law review for your 2L year! Don't feel that you need to go the whole two years to get the full experience.

#### **5. What are Bluebook citations?**

The Bluebook is a citation manual (like MLA or similar) created specifically for the law. As a member of law review, you will likely be required to purchase a Bluebook (which is literally a blue book) since the citation rules are numerous and can be hard to find online. The Bluebook contains citation and grammar rules for virtually every part of legal writing. While at first the Bluebook might seem daunting, as you work with it more, you will start to get a feel for it.

Bluebook citations will be used outside law review as well, in legal writing you complete during law school. The utility of Bluebook citations outside law school becomes more limited. While some practitioners swear by Bluebook rules to inform the substance of their writing, your state will have its own citation rules that may or may not follow the Bluebook format. You will need to learn these for your post-law school legal writing.

#### **6. Does everyone care about law review?**

Law review matters more in some cases than others. If you are planning to go to a big law firm or try for a judicial clerkship after law school, law review is likely for you. If you aren't, it might not be worth the time commitment.

#### **7. The bottom line**

When you are in law school, it is easy to get caught up in feeling like there are things you "should" do to be successful. This includes law review, moot court, serving as a research assistant, and a variety of other roles. Each of these activities has the potential to aid in your success post-graduation. However, none of these activities are necessary.

Entering law review knowing what you want from it is the best way to go. When deciding whether to join, take a look at job postings that might interest you down the line. If the job postings say "law review preferred," you know that is something you should consider. However, if the job postings seem to focus on other attributes, like

commitment to your community or oral advocacy, you know that you might want to focus your efforts elsewhere.



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Originally from Southern California and now based in Seattle, Nyssa is a tech lawyer at Perkins Coie LLP. Her practice focuses on global technology and intellectual property transactions; privacy counseling; and international data requests. Previously, she worked at Microsoft as an IP lawyer and was part of the Pro Bono Steering Committee.

She is also an Aspen NextGen Fellow as part of the NextGen Network of the Aspen Institute, where she focuses on the impact of technology around the world, specifically on the transatlantic relationship between the US and the EU. Additionally, she's the founder of Mentor in Law, a digital learning platform that pro-vides mentorship to law students and early-career lawyers, particularly first-gen and underrepresented groups.

As the daughter of immigrants, Nyssa is a vocal champion of diversity, equity, and inclusion (particularly amplifying the voices of women and minorities) and is a fierce supporter of giving back to the community and paying it forward. She maintains an active pro bono practice, and most recently, she worked with UW Law and Women for Afghan Women to complete humanitarian parole applications for Afghan citizens. Additionally, Nyssa is a mentor to many diverse law students, lawyers, and women startup founders through organizations such as LCLD, Project W, SABA, among others.

Prior to law school, she spent a few years in diplomacy and human rights at U.S. Embassies in New Delhi, Paris, and London through the U.S. Department of State (including the U.S. Mission to UNESCO); freelanced as a travel writer for global publications; and co-founded a health and wellness company.

Additionally, she was a Fulbright Scholar in Berlin, Germany and received a B.A. from the University of California, San Diego, an MSc from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a J.D. from the University of Washington School of Law.

When she's not working, you can find Nyssa on a plane traveling to a new destination or in the kitchen cooking for her friends and family. She's currently working on a family cookbook with her mom on healthy Indian cooking.



# What I Wish I Had Known About Mentoring

By: Nyssa P. Chopra

## Introduction

There is a significant gap in what is being taught in law schools and what is needed from a modern lawyer in the 21st century. To bridge the gap between studying law and practicing law, I created [Mentor in Law](#), a global mentorship platform that provides networking opportunities, community, and 1:1 mentorship to law students and early-career lawyers, particularly to first-generation or underrepresented groups.

First-generation and underrepresented law students and lawyers often enter law school (and subsequently, the workforce) at a disadvantage. With no built-in network or deep institutional knowledge of the legal industry and its norms and nuances, you enter the field without these assets or knowledge of the rules, and often feel like you're alone. You don't know what you don't know. And over time, those network and information gaps can lead to opportunity gaps which only perpetuates the cycle of exclusion in the legal profession.

I know this to be true because I'm a first-generation South Asian-American lawyer - the first and only lawyer in my family. My name is Nyssa, and I'm currently a tech and privacy lawyer at Perkins Coie LLP, where I advise tech clients on international privacy, security, and human rights issues, including cross-border data disclosure requests; digital search and seizure issues; data preservation; content moderation; and compliance efforts under international and federal privacy/data protection laws such as ECPA, SCA, and GDPR. Previously, I was an intellectual property lawyer at Microsoft, and prior to law school, I spent a few years in diplomacy, human rights, and journalism at the U.S. Department of State across New Delhi, London, Paris, and Berlin.

If you're wondering *why* finding mentors and building your network are important, you're not alone. Many don't realize the value of relationships until they need them or it's too late, which can largely contribute to networking feeling icky or transactional. Often, people are not taught *why* mentorship and networking matters or *how* to do it properly, even though they've been told an endless number of times that they should do it. I could write an entire dissertation on building relationships and why you should start today on expanding your network, but I want to keep my advice concise and direct, so in addition to elaborating on *why* finding a mentor and building your network will be among the best things you can do for your career, I also want to provide guidance on *how* to go about it.

To that end, in this chapter, I want to delve deeper into the tactical side of mentorship and networking and provide actionable best practices as you build your career and expand your network, step by step and person by person, respectively. While my path includes being an associate at a BigLaw firm and in-house counsel at a tech company, these practices can be applied in whatever path you choose. I should also note that I grew up not knowing a single lawyer, so it doesn't matter where you start; it just matters that you start today.

**Note:** The following guidance was originally published as part of my Mentor in Law newsletter series. You can sign up for more content on what law school doesn't teach you at [mentorinlaw.org](http://mentorinlaw.org).

## **Mentoring Best Practices:**

Whether you're a law student or already a lawyer, one of the **best** things you can do for your career is to seek out a mentor/group of mentors. In the legal profession, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of having a mentor. Law school teaches you to understand and apply the law, but it does not prepare you adequately to practice law or teach you how to be a lawyer. The right mentor can provide advice, connections, and support that can help you reach heights that would be impossible alone. Mentorship is an even more important asset in today's wild market.

- 1. Assemble your personal dream team.** There are [different types of mentors](#), and you should consider seeking out the different kinds. A few to consider: connector, coach, challenger, champion, and role model. But focus on quality over quantity. I consider 5 as my magic number of mentors at any given time. Everyone has an opinion but be discerning about whose advice you take. Cultivate a small group of people who will always be in your corner whenever you need support or help in your career. Find people whose work you respect, who you may want to be like, and who you feel comfortable with. As you change jobs and move different directions in your career, this "dream team" will likely change as well. While you should have at least one mentor who directly understands your work and field, consider also finding mentors outside of your practice area or industry. Sometimes, all you need is a completely fresh perspective.
- 2. Be thoughtful and intentional with your outreach.** There are both informal and formal channels for finding a mentor, and both have their value. For formal programs, reach out to your law school, alumni networks, local/national bar associations, etc. to see what's available. For informal mentors, do your due diligence on your potential mentor before reaching out. Follow their work on social media, research their practice area, check if they have published any articles, see if you have

any mutual connections, attend an event that they're speaking at, etc. Reach out with a genuine, personalized message and anchor it in a mutual interest/contact or something you found interesting in their work. Instead of focusing on what YOU need, consider what value you can offer them. Most often, relationships evolve organically into mentorships (and then friendships), but sometimes you have to be direct and make the "ask." Generally, do not ask someone to be your mentor unless you already know the answer is "yes," but even then, they still may say no, and that's completely fine. You both move on.

- 3. Mentorship is a give and take relationship (and not a transaction).** As a young professional, it may feel like you may not have much to offer initially, but at the very least, be immensely respectful and appreciative of your mentor's time and advice. They are under no obligation to help you or give their time so generously, so to ensure it's a mutually enriching experience, be punctual, show gratitude, and be proactive. Be flexible with scheduling, show up on time, come prepared with focused questions, send thank you emails/notes, follow through with the advice if you say you will, update your mentor on how it's going, and be of service when you can. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of following through with the advice and keeping your mentor updated on how their advice worked out for you. This is fundamental to establishing a productive, long-term relationship. Think of mentorship as a marathon, not a sprint.

## **Networking Best Practices:**

### **1. Virtual Networking Tips**

With WFH as the new normal, it is more important than ever that we continue to connect with people and build relationships with intention. While there may not be receptions and social events happening, use this "downtime" to expand your network with other law students and lawyers through 1:1 virtual coffees, digital hangouts, and social media. This applies to both people who are actively looking for jobs and for those that already have jobs. Many of the same traditional networking rules apply to virtual networking, but I would argue that virtual networking can be even more impactful as long as you're intentional. Effective virtual networking takes time, effort, and preparation. *Remember:* When you work on your network, your network works for you.

### **BEFORE**

- 1. Make a list of people you want to connect with.** LinkedIn is a good place to start for research. Why are you reaching out to this particular person? Are they practicing the area of law you want to practice or learn more about? Are they doing something (professionally or personally) that piques your interest? Be clear on why you want to connect. Be strategic, intentional, and authentic. Network with people more senior and more junior, and your peers. Consider a diversity of backgrounds,

perspectives, industries, and thoughts. Don't be afraid to think big! Why not create a global network? In the digital age and during COVID times, there's no reason to limit yourself by geography.

- Focus on quality over quantity - strive to meet at least 2 new people a week to start with.
- *Law students:* While looking externally and reaching out to lawyers in the community is a great way to build your network, don't forget your classmates, deans, and professors. I challenge you to get to know at least one new person and your professor from each course. Consider making yearly (or as appropriate) check-in appointments with your dean. You will thank yourself later.

**2. Send a thoughtful, personalized message.** Always conduct your due diligence on the person and their work, so you can be specific and tailor your message accordingly. Are they on social media? Did they recently publish a paper or speak at an event? Did you go to the same school? Do you have a common interest or mutual connection? Tell the person why you're reaching out and what you hope to gain from the interaction – be succinct and to the point. Be respectful of their time. Always ask if the person is open to speaking with you – don't assume it's a yes. Once they're open to a meeting, ask for their availability or suggest a few times and dates – as the asker, you're working around their availability. Use 30 minutes as the default time, unless discussed otherwise. As a general note, do **not** send an invite unless the person has already confirmed their availability for that time.

- If you have a mutual connection, consider asking that mutual connection to introduce you two. But do not be afraid of cold emails/messages - as long as the outreach is intentional and thoughtful, it can be very effective. It may be daunting at first to reach out to complete strangers but this is your career, so get in the driver's seat as quickly as you can. If you're nervous, do it anyway. Power through the discomfort in a way that works for you. Like with anything, the more you do it, the better you'll get.
- Check, double check, and triple check that you're spelling the person's name correctly. It sounds profoundly basic, but you'd be surprised at how few people take this extra step. First impressions may not be everything, but they are important.
- Be respectful, but don't be overly formal when addressing someone (i.e., addressing me as Ms. Chopra is not necessary). As the default, address them by their first name (unless you're contacting a professor, judge, etc.). Also, unless you know otherwise, don't assume that someone uses a commonly known nickname (i.e., if their name is Robert, don't assume they go by Rob or Bob – address them as Robert at first). Pay attention to how they sign their name on the email.

- 3. Research before your meeting.** Prepare a list of specific questions for your meeting so you can keep the conversation focused and get the most out of it. Have a few general questions on hand in case the conversation does not flow. *Remember:* most people want to help, but help them help you by doing your homework.

## **DURING**

- 1. Use video chat if that's a possibility.** This is the best way to mimic a real-life meeting. Don't forget to dress appropriately.
- 2. Be mindful of the time.** Keep track of the time during the meeting. Stay focused, and don't check your phone for anything else but the time – the person in front of you or on the call should be the most important person at that moment.
- 3. Consider creating an end-of-the-conversation rhythm to avoid any awkwardness.** Wrap up the conversation with a considerate statement like “I want to be mindful of your time and want to end with one last question” or something along those lines. At the end, consider asking if there are any other people they'd recommend speaking with. You can also ask whether they have any resources, podcasts, websites, books, etc. that they'd recommend. Don't be afraid to share your own finds that may be of value to them. If someone volunteers to make an introduction for you – **take it seriously**. Relationships are assets, and they're expending that finite social capital on you.

## **AFTER**

- 1. Always, always follow up.** Follow up with a thank you note soon after the meeting. Follow up again after you've implemented their advice, and let them know how it worked out for you, if applicable. Follow up to keep them posted on how things are going. Stay engaged with what they're working on. Think about how you can be of service. Can you connect them to someone you know that's working on something similar? Following up is crucial to building a relationship – be intentional, be helpful, be curious, and be genuine.
- 2. Add the person on LinkedIn with a quick note.** Adding a note personalizes the request and helps you to remember how you two connected later on. Unless you have a personal relationship with them, don't add them on other social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram, particularly if they're private accounts.

- 3. Keep a running list of all the recommended resources, books, etc. and all the feedback you receive.** Create a spreadsheet or use an automated contact management program for your network so you can reference the list later. Attaching keywords to each contact and/or interaction can be an effective cataloging tool. If it's helpful, set reminders for yourself to follow up.

**NOTE:** This is a stressful time for everyone - don't take unresponsiveness or rescheduling personally. Everyone is busy and/or fighting their own battles, so be respectful and understanding.

## **2. Email Etiquette for Networking**

Sending cold emails can be an effective tool for networking, but there is an art to it.

Email etiquette is one of the most common pain points for law students and lawyers, and its importance can't be overstated. The wrong email could be the thing that's standing between you and your dream job. If your goal is to grow your network/get a job this year, take a look at these DOs and DON'Ts so you always put your best foot forward.

### **Humanize your email.**

Start and finish your email with the proper greeting and closing. I have seen many emails that start with "To Whom It May Concern" or "Ms. Chopra." These salutations not only are incredibly formal (and unnecessary), but they also create distance between you and the recipient. In that same vein, refrain from addressing complete strangers as "Hi there!" in a professional context.

As the default, address them by their first name (unless you're contacting a professor, judge, etc.). Also, unless you know otherwise, don't assume that someone uses a commonly known nickname (i.e., if their name is Robert, don't assume they go by Rob or Bob – address them as Robert at first). But pay attention to how they sign their name in their response and use that name going forward.

Networking emails are meant to establish a new relationship, so strike a friendly, but professional tone.

If you were referred to this person by a mutual friend, be sure to mention that friend. And if that mutual friend makes an introduction, respond on the thread by thanking them for the introduction and putting them in *Bcc* so you don't clog their inbox.

**Show your appreciation.**

Words of courtesy go a long way – make sure words such as “please” and “thank you” are used when appropriate. Don’t overdo it and keep it genuine, but the goal is to make sure you don’t come across as **Xdemanding, Xterse, or Xentitled.**

**Do your research.**

Flattery will get you everywhere, but praise that is insincere will get you nowhere. Be intentional with your outreach, and make sure you and the recipient of your email know why you're reaching out to them.

**Be concise.**

Don't ramble on or write a whole story before getting to your request. Get to the point, and get to it quickly. As they say in journalism, don't bury the lede. As a general rule of thumb - on mobile, the recipient should not have to scroll down.

**Pay attention to your subject line and attachments.**

It should be clear from your subject line what your email is about. It should be short, clear, and concise.

If you've referenced an attachment in the email, check and double check that you've attached it. Pay attention to the file size, so you don't clog your recipient's inbox. Also, make sure to appropriately label your files, so it's something like "Nyssa P. Chopra - Resume 2022" instead of "resume." Lastly, send your emails as PDFs whenever possible to avoid any formatting issues.

**Keep your personal and professional emails separate.**

Unless there is a reason to send the email from your professional/work account, consider sending the email from your personal account. Assume that your professional emails are semi-public, so if you're reaching out to someone for another job, assume your current employer can see that. Also, you may want to keep records of the correspondence after you leave the company, so using your personal email is generally a good idea.

**Check, double check, and triple check your spelling, grammar, and tone.**

Ask yourself: Did I spell the person's name correctly? Did I attach the file I mentioned? Is everything properly formatted? Did I check for any spelling/grammatical errors? How is my message coming across--do I sound entitled or am I being respectful of their time? Would I be embarrassed if this email was made public? Is my request/ask crystal clear and concise?

**Add in the email address after you've written the email.**

Write your email, proofread it, and then add in the email address to make sure you don't prematurely send the message.

□ **Respond within a timely manner.**

As a general rule of thumb, you should respond to the email within 24 hours (ideally, within a few hours). Even if it's not something you can immediately address, at least acknowledge receipt and let the person know that you will get back to them as soon as you can.

**Sample outreach email:**

Hello *[Name]*,

I hope you're doing well.

My name is *[your name]*, and I'm a *[job title/law student]* at *[company/school]*. I really admire your *[work/experience]* with *[outlet/company]*. *[Add in what you specifically admire (do your research!).]* I'm interested in finding out more about *[area]* myself and was hoping you'd be willing to provide some insights from your experience.

If you're open to it, I'd love to learn more about you and your *[journey/career path/background]* via a *[Zoom, Teams, etc.]* call.

I understand that your schedule may be busy, so I'm also happy to pass along some questions via email if that's easier for you. Or if you'd prefer, I can reach out at a later date when it's more convenient for you. Either way, I appreciate your time.

Thank you, and I look forward to hopefully connecting with you.

Best,  
*[Your name]*

## **II. Navigating Bias in Practice**



# Darrah Hinton

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Originally from Anchorage, Alaska, Darrah is an associate with Davis Wright Tremaine’s labor and employment groups. Darrah’s practice focuses on labor dispute resolution, negotiations, and employment litigation, where she defends employers in matters arising out of employment-related disputes.

Prior to joining Davis Wright Tremaine, Darrah served as a Deputy Prosecuting Attorney with the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, where she addressed firearm violence through utilizing public health and data-driven approaches. Darrah worked directly with communities most impacted by firearm violence through the development of community-based prevention programs.

While with the KCPAO, Darrah also served as the union president of the King County Prosecuting Attorney’s Association, representing her membership in county-wide and inter-office contract negotiations related to wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Darrah often spends her time giving back to her alma mater, Seattle University School of Law, serving frequently as a guest speaker, mentoring law students, and working with the Office of Admissions as a law school recruiter.

In her spare time, Darrah enjoys playing one of six musical instruments, reading, spending time with her dog, Chance, and her newly-adopted kitten, Monkey.



# What I Wish I had Known in Law School

## Navigating the Legal Profession as a Minority

By Darrah Hinton

### Section Overview

It's no secret that the legal profession's majority demographic is white and male. When you stepped foot on your law school campus for the first time, you might have questioned whether you belong; I assure you, that you do. Law school equips us with an arsenal of tools and resources to help develop us into the best legal advocates; it does not always teach us how to navigate the profession as one from a minoritized background. Those of us who are different than the norm, can find it challenging to navigate new spaces, and may question whether we should truly show up as our authentic selves within the legal profession. This section discusses the practical considerations of practicing authenticity, while offering advice to help readers develop authenticity strategies.

### Showing Up as Your Authentic Self: Fact or Fiction

You may hear people say, "It's okay to show up as your authentic self here," but is that true? What does that mean? And how can you do it in a strategic and sustainable manner? Practicing authenticity may look different for everyone. For example, there are some physical characteristics about us that are immutable; others, we are able to conceal, choosing when to share and whom to share with.

The parts of ourselves that we can't hide: the color of our skin, how we wear our hair, how we dress, etc., allows us to show up as our outwardly presenting selves, but can that be considered authentic if there are parts that we don't share? Undoubtedly, if you're from a minoritized background, chances are you've asked yourself this question. You may have even been worried about how your immutable characteristics may influence decision makers or colleagues. Cognitive biases within the legal profession have long resulted in the disparate treatment of those from minoritized backgrounds. As a result, those of us from these backgrounds may wear a "mask" and may feel compelled to change our behavior in an effort to conform to our surroundings. Once we wear this mask, it can be difficult to take it off. I submit to you, that, even if you are afraid to fully show up as your authentic self, there are ways to incrementally show up as yourself, each and every day.

Authenticity may feel like an abstract concept. The reality is, there are parts of ourselves that we only share with those we're comfortable with, or in spaces that we're comfortable displaying vulnerability in. The other unfortunate reality is, there may be spaces or people that are not open to the parts of ourselves that are either mutable or immutable, thwarting our ability to feel as though we can show up authentically. Thus, despite the potential benefits, and encouragement to do so, self-disclosure can be negatively received, inconsistent with organizational or cultural norms, and hindering to professional opportunities. As a result, the germane question is not whether it's okay to show up as your authentic self, but rather, what does showing up as *your* authentic self mean within a particular environment?

## **Strategies to Develop Authenticity**

There are many strategies that you may utilize to practice authenticity, however, all strategies require a degree of deftness. Below are just a few strategies; please keep in mind that this list is non-exhaustive, and the key tenet in practicing authenticity is to always do what's most comfortable for you.

### **1. Develop Self Awareness**

Authenticity requires possessing a keen awareness of who you are and an ability to assess yourself objectively. By this I mean, examining your perspective, feelings, and overall wellbeing. For example, you may ask yourself whether you enjoy working within a particular area of law, or whether there is another area that interests you more. You may ask yourself whether a particular environment aligns with your values, and if not, whether the divergence is something you are able to withstand, or whether you should seek a different environment. You may also question whether you're aptly applying your authentic skills and talents. Lastly, you may need to examine how much or yourself you are truly able to share, based on your environment. Being authentic requires being honest with yourself.

### **2. Establish an Authentic Support System**

We typically find it easier to demonstrate authenticity in groups that we feel comfortable in. Therefore, it's important to identify a support network of people, who you feel you are able to share parts of yourself with. You may enter a new environment and wonder what those who look like you wear, or how they style their hair. You may wonder whether there are others who identify with a similar characteristic as you. Signing up for affinity groups, mentorship programs, or identifying particular people you'd like to connect with are helpful ways to establish a support system. This support system is a great resource to field ideas, concerns, and to seek general advice from.

### **3. Practice Patience**

Recognize that overcoming inauthenticity and practicing authenticity takes time. It can feel uncomfortable to speak your truth during moments of dissention, and often may take time before you may feel equipped to do so – that's okay. Practicing authenticity may also require a level of assessment within our particular environments that can only be established after time has elapsed. Additionally, finding those spaces and individuals who we feel safe and secure with will take time – developing and fostering relationships require intentional effort. Take the time.

# **III. Public Sector**



# Alizeh Bhojani

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Alizeh Bhojani is a human rights advocate and policy attorney. She received her J.D. and LL.M in Sustainable International Development from the University of Washington School of Law, and a B.A. in International Studies and French, also from the University of Washington. She is barred in Washington and New York. Alizeh was born in Karachi, Pakistan and moved to Washington state when she was ten. She is passionate about the promise and achievement of human rights, stemming partly through her own experiences as an immigrant.

Alizeh is committed to fighting for immigrant rights at the local, state, and federal level. Since joining OneAmerica as the Immigration Policy Manager in 2020, she fought for and won an immigrant relief fund totaling \$340 million for undocumented workers in Washington state. Prior to joining OneAmerica, Alizeh spent almost three years working for the Center for Reproductive Rights advocating for access to assisted reproduction using a human rights lens while centering the experiences of those most impacted by infertility.



# What I Wish I Had Known About Policy and Movement Lawyering

**Author: Alizeh Bhojani**

Lawyers cannot achieve systemic change or fight for social justice on their own, or just with other lawyers. Structural change requires taking direction from directly impacted people - creating a relationship where the lawyer is serving the needs of the movement rather than an individual plaintiff or client.

My name is Alizeh Bhojani, and I graduated from University of Washington School of Law in 2017 with a J.D. and an LL.M. I am currently the Immigration Policy Counsel at an immigration and refugee advocacy non-profit called OneAmerica. I applied to law school because I wanted to enact social change. I didn't know any lawyers personally and my immigrant parents fit into the stereotype of telling me to pursue careers in law or medicine, without really understanding what either entailed. I had no idea that I could use my legal degree to pursue a career in policy making, nor did I get a clear understanding of what movement lawyering can be and why it is necessary to break out of the traditional lawyer-client model to truly serve and further the work of grassroots movements. While public policy and movement lawyering are distinct, my personal journey maturing as an attorney melds the two theories of change.

In this chapter, I will break down what it means to be a policy lawyer, possible career paths, and share some of my own experience being a policy lawyer. I will also delve into what it means to be a movement lawyer, and how my career ambitions sit at the intersection of policy and movement lawyering.

## **Policy Lawyering**

A policy counsel position lets you use your background in the law to make changes in a systemic way. While you don't need a J.D., nor do you have to pass the bar to be successful in public policy, a legal background and degree lend you gravitas and an intimate knowledge of the intersections between the political and judicial worlds. I think of policy work as the proactive arm of the law - addressing issues either before they arise or remedying problems for everyone, not just an individual client. One of the key assets of having a J.D. is that you know how to read a law, when to look for the *shalls* versus the *mays*, and understand the importance and impact of building a record through comments and legislative history. Additionally, it allows you to keep up with any legal challenges and court instituted changes, especially if you work in controversial areas of the law such as immigration.

Typically, a policy counsel spends a lot of time researching, monitoring, and analyzing bills, working with legislators, policy makers, and organizational partners, and drafting bill and amendment language. Policy work also involves a lot of coalition management - working with like-minded organizations who want to advance the same policies and legislation as you, but may have other agendas and egos you must navigate as well. In addition to fantastic research, writing, and speaking skills, policy work requires significant relationship building.

For example, one of the main policy issues at my organization has been creating a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented people in the United States. In 2021, with a newly elected President Biden, people were quite excited for some legislation to pass that would benefit immigrants and undocumented people. I researched the federal budget reconciliation process and the filibuster and then synthesized the information so that my colleagues and the directly impacted people we work with would understand the mechanisms and federal politics we were facing. I organized meetings with every Democratic member of our Washington state Congressional delegation, and ensured that they heard directly from our grassroots leaders about the need for status and protections for undocumented people. I also reviewed multiple drafts of budget language, ensuring that our people would be included. I worked with our national coalition partners to deeply research U.S. Senate rules and procedures so that I could argue directly with Hill staffers about what was possible given the restrictions of the filibuster rule. Ultimately, the legislation did not pass, but that is one of the realities of policy work as well - systemic policy change can take some time, and in the case of immigration, decades.

### **Policy Career Paths**

Policy attorneys have the opportunity to work for non-profits, different levels of government, for think tanks and academic institutions, as lobbyists, and even for the private sector. The pay varies greatly based on geography and whether the job is in the public or private sector. Work hours can also vary greatly depending on the length and timing of the legislative session. Internships with a local, state, or federal legislator would help build experience for a policy attorney role, although these jobs can be highly competitive. It is harder to break into the policy field from law school because there is no linear career or recruitment path, as there is for those interested in big law. Networking and relationship building becomes even more key.

I did not know anything about public policy or politics when I started law school. As a noncitizen, I did not feel invested in the U.S. political system outside of a surface level knowledge because I could not vote at the time. I did not know any policy attorneys and my law school did not present public policy as a viable career path for law school graduates. I found my first job after law school partly through luck, good timing, and my background in human rights. I joined the Human Rights team at the Center for Reproductive Rights as a Legal Fellow. That is where I built and developed my skills in public policy, from how to track, research, and analyze legislation to partnering with other organizations and legislators to create legislation and get it enacted. This fellowship allowed me to understand the value of public policy and the advantages of my legal background and helped shape my next career steps.

## **Movement Lawyering**

Law for Black Lives defines movement lawyering as “taking direction from directly impacted communities and from organizers, as opposed to imposing our leadership or expertise as legal advocates. It means building the power of the people, not the power of the law.” This is different from traditional models of lawyering one might encounter in the private sector or through class actions and impact litigation. Movement lawyers recognize that systemic change occurs through collective action that is led by directly impacted people, not through courts or Congress. Legal strategies are but one of many that work together in concert.

The civil rights movement demonstrates one model of how multiple strategies are necessary and that litigation alone is insufficient. Radical activists and community organizers initiated student sit-ins and multiple direct actions at the same time as attorneys from the NAACP and other social justice organizations pursued legal strategies. These multiple avenues of advocacy allowed activists and advocates to put pressure on lawmakers and create the conditions for success.

Another example is the movement led by undocumented youth to gain status in the United States that resulted in President Obama creating the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA youth organized and led massive rallies and protests and engaged directly with the Obama administration. The directly impacted youth identified the need for research on the President’s legal authority to create a program like DACA and came up with the tactic of having law professors from across the country submit a letter to the President outlining his authority to create such a program and indicating the academic legal community support for such an effort.

Movement lawyering requires taking risks and following the lead of those directly impacted. The election of Donald Trump and his administrations xenophobic and racist policies, police brutality and the summer of protests in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, and the lack of subsequent nationwide change all starkly highlight that we are living in historical times with significant impacts on future generations. Now more than ever, we need attorneys who are willing to put themselves at the service of movements and community members.

This theory of movement lawyering is at the center of how I approach policy advocacy. The reason my organization was at the forefront of the fight for a pathway to citizenship in 2021 was because the directly impacted people with whom we organize identified that as their top priority. On the state level, one of biggest concerns we heard from people was that undocumented workers who were laid off due to the COVID-19 shutdowns did not qualify for any federal stimulus checks nor for state unemployment benefits. People were unable to pay rent, feed themselves or their children, or access healthcare because of these systemic barriers. Directly impacted people identified the need for social safety nets like an unemployment insurance system that undocumented workers could access and that is the policy I have been working on, in conjunction with coalition partners and our community organizers, ever since.

Being an attorney is a privilege and position that holds a lot of power. Whatever field you end up in, take some time to consider how you can contribute to movement lawyering, either through your time or through money. A good starting point is to research organizations like Law for Black Lives that hold trainings on movement lawyering, posts resources, and shares how to get involved. Figure out your niche and passion and find organizations and communities that are ready to partner with you.

# Sarah Rieko Pendleton



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Sarah Pendleton joined the Washington State Supreme Court Clerk's Office as Deputy Clerk on July 1, 2021. She was previously the Chief of Contracts and Legal Services for the Department of Social and Health Services, where she managed a team of 10 attorneys and non-attorneys responsible for managing 80,000 contracts.

Sarah is a proud graduate of both the University of Washington Jackson School of International Studies and Seattle University School of Law. She also received certificates of completion in legal studies from Science Po Paris and Universite Paris Ouest Nan-terre, La Defense, in France. She completed an externship in a francophone chambers at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and began her legal career at an American law firm in Paris, France.

Sarah and her husband Josh stay busy with their energetic and fun-loving kids, Lilah (4) and Jordy (1). Sarah grew up in the Ballard neighborhood of Seattle and currently resides in Puyallup.



# What I Wish I Had Known About Public Service

**Author: Sarah Pendleton**

## **1. What kind of jobs are there in government for lawyers?**

There are many jobs in Washington state government that are a fit for someone with legal training. For example, all state agencies, the legislature, and the courts have staff attorneys. Don't forget the State's largest law firm, the attorney general's office.

If you aren't sure if you want to practice law in the traditional sense, you might also want to keep an eye out on [careers.wa.gov](https://careers.wa.gov) for jobs posted in agency offices such as contracts, administrative appeals, compliance, legislative affairs, or human resources (ex. policy, compliance, investigations).

Keep in mind that you might not find your dream job as a newbie to state government right away. I would recommend that you focus first on getting your foot in the door. Often, once you get into state government, you are better positioned to be considered for higher level positions. Government is risk averse. Therefore, it is generally more appealing for most government entities to hire from within because people who are already in state government understand the politics, processes, and rules of operating in the public sector, and people already know who you are and have a general idea of how good of a fit you may be for the job.

Getting your foot in the door might also mean taking a job that might not be a standard "lawyer" job. For example, your path may be entering a contracts department as a contracts manager, which might not require a legal background, and then applying for and transitioning into a contracts lawyer/counsel position after getting a year or two of experience under your belt. Upward promotions and lateral moves from agency to agency are very common because that is generally the only way you can be offered substantial increases in salary or benefits.

## **2. What are the benefits of working for the government?**

Although you may be missing out on the gorgeous views and amenities offered by law firms by taking a government job, there are many benefits to working in government that may not be common knowledge. The most well-known public sector benefits are the retirement and health benefits. That is absolutely true. You will have access to top of the line health care for yourself and your family members, and depending on the Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) you choose, you will receive a lifetime retirement pension once you have vested. A Washington state public servant will generally vest after 5 years of public service. What that means is that if you have worked a minimum of five years for the State, you will be eligible to receive a pension after you retire (which is calculated based on how much you earn and how long you stay working in government) for the rest of your life, even if you leave state government.

Although it may not be the case 100% of the time, generally, working in government gives you a greater work/life balance than in the private sector. This is most especially true if you are someone who plans on having children or already have children and wish to have the flexibility to leave work to take kids to doctor's appointments, or to log off at 5pm and go watch a soccer game. Similarly, many agencies within Washington State have recently adopted a "bring your baby to work" program where parents can bring babies under 6 months old to work with them. Some agencies also offer child care on site or offer subsidized child care benefits for parents of little ones.

The weight of even the thought of your student loan debt can be crushing. However, you have less to fear if you are entering public service out of law school because as long as you are registered under the correct loan repayment plan, you should be able to benefit from the federal public service loan forgiveness (PSLF) program. PSLF is a program that allows anyone working full-time for the government or in the public sector to have their federal loans forgiven after 10 years of service and after 120 “qualified payments” on their loan. Check out the Chapter on “What I Wish I Had Known About Financing Law School” for more information regarding public service loan forgiveness and other tips regarding finances.

The final benefit of working for the government that I will leave you with is one that not many people think about when looking for a job right out of law school. I myself did not grow to appreciate this benefit until I spent several years in the public sector. The benefit is making a positive public impact and working towards the mission of an agency or public sector entity. As we know, the government (hopefully) exists to serve the people. This service mindset in state government is one that I hold dear. You also get a chance to work with people who are from very different walks of life that you may not have had a chance to interact with if working in the private sector. This intangible benefit is one that brings me back to work each day.

### **3. What are the drawbacks of working for the government?**

Although there are many benefits to a legal career in the public sector, there are also some drawbacks. Some of these include less money, fewer networking opportunities, and potentially the risk of pigeon-holing yourself out of the private sector.

In terms of money, by choosing the public sector over the private sector, you may be in for a bit of a surprise when you see what your other friends in the top-tier law firms are making. When choosing to enter the public sector it would be safe to assume that you will likely be making about 30-40% less than lawyers in the higher-paid portion of the private sector. However, when looking at the price tag, you should also take into account the amount of money saved over time by enrolling in the public service loan forgiveness plan and factor in how much money you will be collecting over the course of your life in pension benefits.

The incentives and flashy benefits are definitely not something government work is known to provide. If you are looking to receive gifts from your clients, free tickets to football games, and to attend fancy work galas, government life may not be for you. You will also get less exposure to other lawyers when you are in the public sector. There are of course organizations such as the government lawyer’s bar association where you can gather once a month and chat with other lawyers working in similar fields, but generally, you should expect to feel a bit out of the loop when it comes to the legal community. The benefit of working in government is that you will have the opportunity to work with many types of people from different backgrounds and specialty areas, but 95% of them will likely be non-lawyers, unless you are working for a court, the attorney general’s office, or the prosecutor’s office. However, there are programs like the Washington Leadership Institute and other legal organizations that you can join or volunteer for in order to stay connected to the legal scene in Washington.

Lastly, one drawback that I often hear from attorneys who decided to join the public sector ranks early in their careers is that they feel pigeon-holed out of the private sector. Because your area of expertise may not easily translate into the private sector, you may have fewer opportunities to move from the public sector back to the private sector. However this is not a hard and fast rule and it all depends on your job and where you work. If you work in a place like the attorney general’s office, many of the skills you learn

there will translate easily to the private sector. If you work in areas such as contracts law, compliance, HR, or policy, those skills will also translate pretty seamlessly to corporations or private businesses.

All in all, it's all about balancing your preferences and needs. It is important to really sit down and think about what you are looking for in a job and what your goals are professionally, not only in the short term, but big picture as well. Go and talk to lawyers from both the private and public sector and find out what they think are the benefits and drawbacks of their jobs. If you are looking for a good work/life balance in a job where you feel like you are making positive change in your community, I would highly recommend that you at least look into potential job opportunities in Washington State government.

#### **4. Advice**

Before you embark on your public service journey, I want to leave you with some nuggets of wisdom that you can take or leave, but I would have loved to know before I started down the path.

First, I have both interviewed and been an interviewer for several different government agencies in Washington. If you don't remember anything else, I want you to take one piece of advice from me about interviewing in the public sector: Do your research. Each public entity has a website where you can find information regarding organizational structure, leadership, mission, and values. Make sure you study that and build it into your answers as best you can. Often, one of the first questions you will be asked is why you think you would be a good fit for the role. This is your cue to explain how your interests and expertise align with the mission and values of the agency.

Once you ace that interview and start in your new government job and you begin strategizing about how to climb up the ladder, there are a few things you should make sure to include in your strategy. Learn the organizational chart and the politics of the agency. Learn from folks who have already been with the agency for several years and figure out who the influencers are in the agency. Some government agencies have formal mentorship or leadership development programs that you should definitely try and join as soon as you can. If there are no formal programs, take charge and reach out to the power players in your organization and ask them for an informational interview or informally ask if you can pick their brain over coffee. The relationships you build in those first few years in government will get you far and often lead to future career opportunities.

Finally, government work is inherently political. Leadership changes occur often and each new leader will come in guns blazing eager to implement new processes and initiatives. So get used to change and be flexible. Try to get comfortable being uncomfortable and anticipate changes early by keeping your ears open and by creating strong relationships with people across the agency. Interestingly, at the same time that the government is always changing, it is also fairly slow to change in other ways, especially administratively. For example, IT systems utilized by the government are generally at least 5 to 10 years behind what is used in the private sector. There will be many processes that you are expected to abide by just because it's always been done that way. If you go into the job anticipating the quirks of government, you will be better prepared to navigate and will be more successful and happy in your public sector job.

# **IV. Private Sector**



# Andre Dayani

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Andre Dayani serves as the Managing Partner for Dayani Law Firm. When Andre launched the firm in 2016, he had a clear intention for the practice: he would represent his clients as he would a friend. He would be clear and concise without the lawyer speak. He would work efficiently and save his clients unnecessarily inflated attorney fees and costs. He would relate to his clients at the human level, be honest with them, and defend them fiercely.

Originally from Topanga Canyon in California, Andre moved to the Pacific Northwest to attend the Seattle University School of Law (SU). Andre is a proud SU Academic Resource Center (ARC) graduate who now mentors SU law students in the ARC program.

After graduation from law school, Andre began his legal service at the King County Department of Public Defense as a public defender. There he developed trial advocacy and his passion for serving the underrepresented. Andre continues the public defense mission in private practice, where he devotes a majority of his practice to serving Spanish speaking clients all over Washington.

Andre served as the Vice President of Events for the Latina/o Bar Association of Washington from 2019-2022, and regularly volunteers at the bilingual LBAW legal clinic.

Andre guides people through all forms of legal and personal crises. Andre believes that at the core, all people are equal, and with a softness of heart, a person can deepen and thrive in their world. Andre loves exploring the world with his wife and law partner, Lauren. During his free time, he practices film photography, collects records, and competes in Jiu Jitsu. He likes chatting about the universe, life passions, and love.



# What I Wish I Had Known About Starting a Law Firm

**Author: Andre Dayani**

This article is about what it was like to start a law firm. I want to share what I wish I had known while I was in law school about representing clients in my own practice and running my own business.

First of all, please take my experiences and recommendations with a grain of salt. You might have your way of starting your own thing, and that's okay. As my teacher said, there are many ways up the mountain. Hopefully, this article will give you some ideas on a path up.

Launching my own firm was utterly frightening. I didn't start out in law school wanting to run my own practice, and no one really explained the option to us in school. I had no idea where even to start and less idea of how to make money. For me, it seemed that my law school education left out the most significant part of being a lawyer — actually practicing law. It was assumed that you would find employment in a firm, receive a regular paycheck from them, and that was that.

I worked some years as a public defender and afterward, I thought I had my dream job lined up. I was going to work in a high-profile civil litigation firm. I had my trial skills sharpened, and now I was ready to try my hand at civil practice. I was prepared and excited for a career transition. My years at the public defender were valuable and I was eager to try my hand at something else. This new job possibility was an excellent opportunity, and I felt confident about my career trajectory. And then I got the email. The firm told me they were going in “a different direction” and would not be offering me the job. Ever get that old sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach? It hit me hard.

## **One foot in, one foot out**

So, I started my law firm in a fit of desperation. I was without work for several months, and the job applications I sent went nowhere. I was cold-applying to firms outside my practice area, which has to be an advanced form of torture. How do you claim a fit for a job with utter lack of experience? Meanwhile, I thought I could take in a client or two to sustain me for a couple of months while I interviewed for jobs.

I trapped myself between two worlds: I didn't have enough civil experience to get hired by a firm, and I was too afraid to fully jump, two feet in, representing clients on my own. No one in law school ever taught me how to create a law practice, and, several years out of law school, I was too stubborn to ask for help.

Do you know what potential clients can detect with incredible accuracy? Desperation. Neediness. Grasping.

One day, I met a potential client at Starbucks. He had a criminal defense case and money to pay, and I was flat broke. My palms were sweaty, and I felt like I was going to throw up my breakfast. Within minutes, I came off too strong. Did I quote him too high? Did he know I never represented a paying client? I couldn't figure out how to ask him for his money. And I had never asked someone for several thousands of dollars for my work before. After several minutes of dancing around the subject of price, I could tell he was making up his mind to leave, and I panicked. I said I would do it for a quarter the price that other attorneys charged. I nearly begged him to give me the case. After a half hour of nervously talking his ear off, he looked awkwardly at his phone, thanked me for the coffee, and left.

It was a bad moment, and things got worse from there.

I had so much fear and anxiety about the prospect of failing that I started blaming everyone and everything outside of myself. In a strange act of what I thought was self-protection, I pushed the people closest to me out of my life. I started flaking on friends, spewed anger at my family, and blew up the relationship with the woman I loved. I went into a deep depression. I was in a dark night of the soul and didn't know what to do.

I hit rock bottom.

I can say now with full confidence that nothing is more beautiful than hitting rock bottom. Why? Because it is only there that we *finally* and *truly* let go, really lay it all down: all of the belief systems and all of the structures that we so tightly hold onto, to keep some semblance of control. I began loosening my grip. I put my ego aside and said maybe, just maybe, I didn't have it all together, and I didn't know all of the answers. What a concept! It was the feeling of getting humble. I surrendered. I started therapy, and instead of blaming others, I took some self-responsibility. I put myself into this position and would need to get myself out of it.

What an incredible feeling! I took all of those structures I had used to hold me up, gently set them down, and started over. I burned the proverbial house down. I looked at how hard on myself I was, and how I projected my insecurities on others. I saw how I kept others from knowing the real me because I feared they would see my weaknesses.

And I started from knowing nothing again.

I'm so proud of myself for letting go. I learned I could move honestly and purposely in whatever direction I committed to. I could be open and vulnerable with others and still be empowered. I could just be myself and set down the harsh self-criticism. I canceled the remaining applications for jobs, finished my law firm website, and announced my intention to the world that I was starting my own firm. I closed the backdoors and gave myself no other choice. I made my law firm and my development as a person my Plan A. I took a leap of faith, and I bet on myself.

I am going to break up starting a law firm into three parts: (1) Your Practice, (2) Your Business, and (3) Becoming You.

## **1. Your Practice**

Your practice is about applying your strengths and talents in a way that only you know to do. There is no “right” or “wrong” in this. It’s about your vision. How do you see yourself doing your thing? Are you representing clients in front of juries or working behind the scenes as an unsung hero? What type of work is interesting to you? Where would you best apply your gifts?

Experiment, listen to your heart, and find out what pulls you. Some of the things I never thought I was interested in during law school are now my primary practice areas. It took some experimenting to find out what called to me.

While it is possible to start your legal practice right out of law school, I do suggest some intentional exposure to an area of law before you set out to represent your own clients. I learned the most about my practice while working as a public defender. I was at the courthouse every day and saw a wide array of different styles and personalities in different lawyers, and the effectiveness of each approach. I watched other attorneys arguing motions and trials. That exposure was extremely helpful to me in developing my own style.

Practice Tip #1: Go to court and watch jury trials and testimonial motions. Most courts publish their docket online so you can find out what a case is about and attend the hearing. Some courts even broadcast their hearings online. You can request copies of documents from the court clerks. Find attorneys you admire and watch their practice. See how they move and how they address the jury. Hear what they say and what they don't say. Your practice is your own, but you can take direction from the greats. Be open, curious and observant.

Practice Tip #2: Ask for help. Your legal practice requires a lot of learning, so be open to putting yourself in unknown areas. I still battle this discomfort after nearly a decade of practice. Sometimes a case will touch an area of the law that I am not fluent in, and the fear of making a mistake becomes paralyzing. I can say with experience though that it is made much worse when I do not ask for help because I am assuming other attorneys don't have time or do not want to be bothered with basic questions. This is almost always not true. I have learned time and time again that the people around us are more willing to help than we know. Find a mentor in the unfamiliar practice area and talk it through. It's ok to be new at something. You don't have to pretend you know it all when you are starting out, and in fact that type of attitude is much more harmful than it is helpful. Ask questions and ask for help.

Practice Tip #3: Don't spread your practice *too* thin when you start your law firm. The temptation will be strong for you to take any case that comes through your door when you are trying to generate income. And there might be times when more flexibility is

necessary, or even when it is beneficial to learn something new (see Practice Tip #2), but be wary of entering into too many fields where you have no experience and no ability to learn or limited resources to be able to learn. Find a couple of subject areas at most and become good at them.

Practice Tip #4: Take advantage of free or available resources. The King County Law Library in particular is one of our law firm's secret weapons. KCLL gives out free access to Washington practice manuals in most legal areas if you are a subscriber. Also, they have specialty Westlaw/Lexis access, and their staff can help you research or pull specific case law for a nominal fee. For us, using the King County Law Library really stepped up our legal game.

Listserves are another vital resource we use. Joining a listserv allows you to shoot out a question to a community of other attorneys who have more experience than you. Members of the forum are generous in providing different perspectives and feedback that you can take and weigh in your own decision-making about your case. In the criminal defense and personal injury listserves, there's a sense of camaraderie, and far less competition than you might presume. People are open to answering questions from strangers and regularly share briefs and motions. Use the search function in the listserv archives if you have a specific question, and you will get a lot of hits on others who had the same question in the past. Or you can just ask. You don't have to reinvent the wheel, and you can save a lot of your time and billable hours if you find answers quicker through these resources.

## **2. Your Business**

This section speaks to the nuts and bolts of the law firm.

The logistics of how to run a law firm can scare most people away from starting their business. But do not fear. If I could navigate it, you can too. No matter what type of firm you create, the business requirements are consistent across the board. Below is by no means an exhaustive list, but are some basic things to get you started:

(i) Licensing: You must ensure that you are properly licensed to run your firm. That includes not only your bar licensing but also your state and local business licenses.

(ii) Insurance: Malpractice insurance is cheaper the earlier you are in your practice. You should also budget for your health insurance.

(iii) Taxes: You will need to research what taxes you must pay at the local and state levels. I highly recommend hiring a bookkeeper or CPA to get a lay of the land and ensure you comply.

(iv) Bank Accounts: You will need an operating account for all firm costs and income to flow. You may also need a trust account for all client money. You must learn how to manage your trust account. Small law firms are ripe targets for the IRS audit because we often deal with client money and generally have little internal oversight. It was all

hammered into our heads in RPC class but it is worth repeating: do not mix your money with client money! If your trust account is a single cent overdrawn, that will automatically trigger an audit. That is the fastest way to not only a bar complaint but also expose yourself to criminal liability. Before you open your trust account, read about the [rules and regulations of trust accounts put out by the WSBA](#).

(v) Marketing: Share the valuable knowledge you have, and be consistent in generating content. Had a strange issue in a case that you figured out? Film a quick video or write up a little blog post. Got a small court victory? Share it. Have information for people to know about your field of law? Share it. When you share your genuine knowledge from a place of generosity, it sends a little energy bolt into the atmosphere and there is certain ripple effect that occurs. Maybe there is no immediate direct hit where someone calls you right away, but maybe someone sees it and later thinks about you and gives their friend who is looking for a lawyer your name. Plus, some of the more prominent firms have stingy knowledge-sharing policies, where they are protective about giving out free information out of a sense of competition with other law firms, so sharing freely will set you apart. Also, that type of competitive attitude is nonsense. The more you share with generosity of heart, the more you will receive. That's how it works.

(vi) Online reviews: You need them. Google reviews are most valuable. Get comfortable asking your clients for reviews upon delivering your finished work product. I like to ask my clients on the phone to commit to writing a review for me. You worked hard and can ask your clients to show you some love. It doesn't always work: some clients will never write a review no matter how well you handled their case. Others will be your rainmakers. No matter what, make the ask.

A note on bad reviews: Some might throw you shade and leave a bad review. Bad reviews are inevitable, and every significant business I've seen has some bad apple reviewers. I appreciate it when companies handle it with care and don't become defensive. Defensiveness is a sign that there might be truth in the poor review. If you are confident in your work product and know the bad review isn't valid, disregard it. Some people get drunk on the power they have in posting reviews online and just want to spew their negativity. Handle it with grace, and perhaps post a thoughtful reply out of kindness. Don't let the trolls win, and move forward in peace.

(vii) Website: Square-Space is a solid start for their design templates, and it is made to be easy to use. I like their platform because it doesn't require much backend tinkering. There are many other providers as well. Choose the one that is easiest for you to use, design and modify when you need to. Write copy for all your pages and edit it as you grow your business. Keep your copy current. Your message *should* change throughout the life of your business, getting refined as you move forward. That's a good thing! Spending time on your website is a good use of time because your website reflects your business's identity.

Business Tip #1: Be careful not to spend too much money on your start-up costs. You don't need fancy computers or suits to get clients. Save these costs for later when you have a good idea of how your cash flows through your business. Too many people fall into the trap of over-leveraging themselves when starting a firm. I am speaking from personal

experience. It took me a long time to climb out of the credit debt prison. When I started my firm, I felt the urgency to attract clients quickly. I signed up for services to get my name out, and I ended up hooked paying those contracts for years later. Be selective about which (if any) marketing services you engage with. Remember that those services are businesses and they are trying to make a sale.

Business Tip #2: Every share or post doesn't have to be perfect. People love to see you doing good in the world, and most of the time, they want you to succeed. Showing the inner workings and behind-the-scenes of your practice is good content. Staying top of mind authentically, without being pushy or annoying, is a great practice.

If you are still wary about the business side of a law firm, join a law firm incubator. The Seattle U Incubator was extremely valuable to me and helped me make sure I was square on the logistics of getting my law firm running. Plus, an incubator can give you a sense of community in the journey, with mentorship and support to really thrive.

## **A NOTE ON MONEY**

Needless to say, a few paragraphs within this article are not enough to explore the power of money and how money moves. Money is a topic that can make us feel a little nauseous, especially when it seems like it isn't around. In reality, it is. We just have to learn to take it.

I've found that money is a relationship we have like any other relationship in our lives. Like any other relationship, it is worthwhile to spend the time examining, digging into, and nurturing how you relate to money. A neglected, dysfunctional or repressed relationship with money can kill your budding dreams of becoming an entrepreneur, much like a plant cannot grow without sun or water. If you feel tightness or are flooded by feelings of lack when thinking about this topic in the context of starting your own practice, know that this is very typical. I certainly went through it. When I started my business, I had a lot of lack mentality about money. I felt like there wouldn't be enough for me, and even if I did have money start to flow my way, I was fearful that it would surely dry up. These false belief systems blocked my forward momentum and made me feel deflated, which then ironically became a self-fulfilling prophecy with the money itself. When you are in lack mentality, money seems to sense this and it will not come. But the more you relax and develop a sense of abundance, the more you start to draw money toward you. This is what happened for me.

There's more money around us than we can imagine. Your firm can make you as much money as you can dream. That's right! I can confidently tell you this because I've seen it. I've seen small firms create giant footprints with millions of dollars of revenue.

If you invest your *intention* and *attention* into your firm and do *good* work, and move with a sense of abundance, I promise you, the money will come. You don't have to subscribe to get-rich seminars or classes.

### 3. Becoming You

If you choose, growing your business can be part and parcel of growing as a person. When I started my practice, I didn't have confidence in my voice. I wasn't sure what I was or what I could provide to clients. But as I developed my inner world and worked on myself and my mind, I also grew as a business owner.

One of the most important human-and-also-business lessons I have learned through this work is this: caring so much about what others think of you is an absolute, one-hundred percent, guaranteed waste of time. It will stunt your growth and block you from sharing your gifts with the world. When I first started my business, I cared deeply about what others thought of me. In every interaction, I tried to control how I came across and how my new business appeared to others. That got me absolutely nowhere. Caring about what others think of you is the most significant distraction you will face in your business, and, may I say, in your life.

Here's the secret: Someone else's opinion of the way you are moving is simply not your concern. When I started, many people around me, including some friends and family, told me how difficult it would be for me if I went on my own. They projected their own fears of failure onto my plans. They focused on how I would struggle. They told me about people that started businesses and failed. Sadly, in our culture, we often relate to each other from negativity. So put on metaphorical earplugs when this happens to you. Lack is *not* the truth of the universe, and I will not pass this negativity or fearful mindset to you here. It is my direct experience that this world is filled with infinite possibilities and it is all open to you.

I get emotional thinking about how much heart I've poured into my business. It's felt like I've lived and died many times trying to get my thing off the ground. It might feel that way for you too. There will be days when your phone doesn't ring, and you will face the darkest nights in your life. Who am I to be doing this? Should I stop? Give up and run? Or do I believe in something beyond myself? Do I push forward despite these deep uncertainties?

For me, I had no other option but to keep going. This has been my biggest blessing because my practice has given me the sweetest fruits. So, I implore you to push forward and not give up. Your business will provide for you if you really commit to it with your whole heart.

Your business's development is like anything that grows in nature. Give it your presence, attention, and love, and it will thrive. Do not be distracted by others and what they are doing. You can feel happy for them and their successes. Your development is your own.

It is exactly like a cluster of trees in the forest, with one tree smaller than the others around it. It may seem like the small one is not going to survive. Meanwhile, it receives nutrients from the soil, water from the sky, and attention from the sun. Years can pass with slow gains. Then one day, inexplicably, the tree explodes in growth. It shoots straight up, reaching for the heavens, far surpassing the surrounding trees. There may be no explanation as to why it took so long. Such may be the way with your practice. Apply

patience through times of difficulty and rest in your knowing that you are offering something special that the world needs.

My wish for you is to create from your heart and share your flowers with the world. People have created some of my favorite things on earth by believing in themselves and going out on their own. A law firm, funnily enough, is no different. You will be able to reach more people than you know. To every person you represent, you give them some of you. You will be sending out a positive ripple into the world. I, for one, look forward to seeing your ripple and what you create.

Be brave and give yourself no other option. Make you and your business your Plan A. You really can do it.



# Micah Bobo

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Micah Bobo is currently corporate counsel for Amazon where he focuses on real estate transactions with an emphasis on retail leasing. Overall, Micah has amassed over 16 years of real estate experience; first as an agent, then a broker, and finally an attorney. Prior to coming to Washington, he practiced law in California, most recently at Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP, where he was an associate working on a wide range of real estate related matters including housing developments, commercial leasing, purchase and sales, zoning, and licensing and regulatory issues.

Micah graduated from Berkeley Law in 2012, where he had the distinction of being a Law and Economics Fellow and was an editor for the Berkeley Journal of African-American Law & Policy. In addition to his firm and corporate work, he has enjoyed numerous pro bono projects, including assisting multiple small and community oriented businesses and ventures with their legal needs.

Outside of his professional work, Micah enjoys running a small hobby farm with his wife and two dogs, horseback riding, lifting weights, writing fiction, playing video and board games, 3d printing, and attending science fiction/fantasy conventions.



# **What I Wish I Had Known About In-House Counsel**

**Author: Micah D. Bobo (he/him), Black, Asperger's (Autism Spectrum Disorder)**

## **1. During the Interview and on the Job, Show Them You're Not Just the "No" Attorney**

There is often the appearance that in-house counsel are "no" people. Ideas that might otherwise be appealing to a company are frequently cautioned against or outright killed on the advice of counsel. Firms are by nature very conservative from a risk standpoint. Businesses are frequently much less so. As in-house counsel, you advise your business clients on not just the law, but the potential for enforcement (if known) and the penalties for punishment. In the end, it may frequently be a business decision on whether the rewards outweigh the potential risks. It's important to get across in an interview that you understand this concept. It's also important to get across that you're not just about telling them if an idea is legally risky, but if it is, what safer alternative approaches might be possible in a given scenario. Also keep in mind that in-house counsel may be required to act in emergency situations more often than most outside counsel and it's important to respond practically to challenges that arise.

There will come a time when you need to be firm in your positions. Especially as a diverse attorney, expect second-guessing or push back particularly when you give advice that isn't what your clients want to hear. You need to be able to explain your position thoroughly, calmly, but with the degree of firmness merited by the situation. Do not apologize for reasonably disagreeing with others or when you believe you've done nothing wrong. Instead make sure to thank people for sharing their views and do your best to show them you understand their point of view even if you can't agree with it. Generally, but most importantly if your advice is not headed, be sure to document the advice you gave (i.e. by keeping an e-mail trail).

## **2. If You Need an Accommodation, Make it As Easy For Them As Possible**

ADA "Reasonable Accommodations" are one of the least understood areas by even large businesses. Do not struggle with your disability more than you have to when an accommodation can make your life easier. You suffer, your work suffers, and your company suffers. In order to have as smooth an experience as possible, review any company policies on making reasonable accommodation requests and apply accordingly, but do not be surprised if your manager or even human resources representative does not appear to be completely familiar with how to proceed. As such, make sure your request has all of the essentials—it identifies the job function you're having difficulty with due to your disability, it includes any requisite medical support for your disability and relates

that disability to performing the work, and it includes a proposal for an accommodation that should address the foregoing. Make the request in writing (preferably by e-mail).

First, when making your request, you need to be clear as to what job function you are having difficulty with. While your company is supposed to identify all of your position's job functions somewhere, frequently this is not the reality. Consequently, be as clear as possible what job function it is you are having difficulty with and, if not blatantly obvious, explain why that job function is performed (if you've been cited in a recent job performance review, make mention of that and use the description in the review). Second, your need must arise from a disability. This can be the result of neurodiversity or a more typical physical condition. Do not dismiss or downplay mental or neurodiverse conditions. When making your request, review the company's policies on what medical information they require to support your condition for the accommodation request. If there is none, err on the side of including a letter from your treating provider supporting your medical need for the accommodation. Finally, your accommodation cannot require others to take on your job functions or materially modify their behavior to accommodate you. Keep this in mind when drafting your request.

While employers are required to work with you on reasonable accommodations and it is illegal for employers to discriminate or retaliate based on disabilities or accommodation requests, the reality can be very different. Discrimination can be hard to prove and even when a plaintiff can potentially prevail, they must weigh it against the knowledge that such lawsuits can become public knowledge and affect their future employment opportunities. In any case, make sure to be professional, persistent, and document everything, but always keep in mind that there are employers out there willing to be reasonable for a valued employee even if your current one will not.

### **3. Organize and Improve the System**

More than at a firm, managing your inbox and workload are critical, especially for neurodiverse attorneys. If you receive dozens or over a hundred e-mails a day (not unusual at large companies), it's easy to miss some. As a diverse attorney, you may find yourself being looked at more critically than at a firm because of the larger number of clients and contractors you may interact with regularly. It's all the more important to be organized and miss as little as possible. You might organize your e-mails with important clients and leaders within the company going into a special folder. You should always respond to important people quickly, even if it's to simply acknowledge that you are working on their request. You might also consider separating the e-mails that are "to" you from the e-mails you are simply CCed on. There is a plethora of ways that Outlook and other e-mail programs can organize e-mail and make it more manageable. Make sure you're fully versed on how to use the computer programs at your disposal. Don't wait until you're overwhelmed.

Depending on your positioning in-house, you may have opportunities to improve the existing system. Perhaps you can create legal forms and/or processes to improve self-help by non-lawyers. You may put on training in order to make both you and your clients' work lives easier. These are all opportunities to show your value and improve the company. However, make sure that there is visibility into what you're actually doing by those above you. This is critical. You aren't billing hours anymore, so your contributions may not be easily tracked. Spend time working on highly visible projects if you can and if all else fails, let your manager know by e-mail a summary of things you are currently working on and send such e-mails periodically.

Finally, and certainly not least, you may have the opportunity to choose which outside firms or contractors your company works with. Make sure you push for diverse choices. No matter whether you're at a for-profit company or a non-profit, there are opportunities to improve the system and help others. Make use of these opportunities. They don't just help your mental wellbeing, but they improve the system overall and may help you build lasting connections.

# What I Wish I Had Known About Big Law

**Author: Micah D. Bobo (he/him), Black, Asperger's (Autism Spectrum Disorder)**

## **1. In An Interview, Highlight Why You Are What They're Looking For**

Try to find out as much information as you can about your interviewers and the attorneys that you may be expected to work under before the interview. While this should include their professional credentials, it should also include their personal interests. This information may be present on their work biographies or may otherwise be accessible on the internet. It may also be known to mutual contacts (professors or attorneys you meet at events). People want to work with people they share things in common with, so make sure to highlight your personal and recreational activities that you believe are shared. This is perhaps even more important when you have a significantly different cultural or socioeconomic background than your interviewers. As much as firms claim to want diverse attorneys, this often means attorneys who look diverse, but who are otherwise as similar to them as possible. Highlighting mutual interests will make them far more comfortable with you.

During lunch interviews, don't worry about what food costs. If you're from a middle-class or working class background, the price of the food at upscale restaurants may make you uncomfortable. Instead, concentrate on ordering something that is easy to eat while making conversation. For example, salad or steak are often good choices as they're easy to eat with a fork and are generally not messy. Not eating may make your interviewers uncomfortable and fretting over the price may make them feel you will not fit in.

If you're interviewing during law school, when interviewing for positions in a specific field, try to understand what makes a good lawyer in that field. For instance, many would agree that tax lawyers are actually puzzle solvers, not just problem solvers. When explaining why you want to work in tax, along with including any relevant background, make sure to drop into the conversation, "I enjoy solving puzzles." In order to find out what makes a good lawyer in that field, ask lawyers in that field, including professors and attorneys at events. If you have a background or connection to the field, make that known in those conversations. Frequently attorneys you meet out in the wild, especially if you're aiming for a specified area of law, will end up being your interviewers. The law is a surprisingly small world and, especially if you're a diverse attorney, getting people familiar with seeing you can really help.

Especially for mid-sized firm interviews, ask how they generate clients. This is a surprisingly unusual question for new lawyers, but one that's extremely important to partners and will help you stand out. It'll also give you an idea of what may await you

down the road. If you want to learn about problems at a potential place of employment, ask “If you could change one thing about your firm/company, what would it be?” This is a far better question than asking if people at their work are friendly (virtually no one will say they aren’t) and far less off-putting than asking if there’s anything they don’t like.

## **2. Be As Selective As You Can With Your Firm**

Assuming you are situated to pick from more than one opportunity, it’s important to pick the one that gives you the best chance for success. Underrepresented attorneys are overrepresented in their departure from firms, particularly Big Law.<sup>1</sup> Reasons listed by many, if not most of these attorneys in interviews, often come down to not having enough work, not receiving the right work (i.e. quality work that leads to other opportunities), or feeling alienated. Many of these issues may be tied to perceptions of attorneys from underrepresented groups. For instance, in a study with 53 partners from 22 law firms, a leadership consulting firm found that partners reviewing a memo gave it (on average) a 28% higher score if they were told the memo was done by a white man as opposed to a black man.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the fact that all partners reviewed the same memo, containing the same planted errors, but found (on average) twice as many of those errors when they were told that a black man created it rather than a white man, feeds into a rich body of evidence that underrepresented groups are looked at more critically than their overrepresented counterparts. While the discrepancies in treatment are shockingly easy to see in a study, on a day to day basis within a firm, they are far less visible, but no less felt by those on the receiving end. You can significantly help your chances by picking a firm that’s shown a commitment to resolving these discrepancies.

Just about all major Big Law firms, and many mid-sized ones, have diversity initiatives of varying types. You can certainly ask about these, particularly during an interview, but don’t give them much value in your employment decisions. Too often these initiatives are window dressing. Look at their results. While you can check out the statistics of many firms, it’s also helpful to look at the roster of the office you’d be working at with particular attention to the partners. If the office is more diverse, particularly at higher levels, then there is a greater chance the firm (or at least office) has better addressed issues that normally push underrepresented groups out. Diverse partners may also be key allies in the future.

Talk to diverse attorneys familiar with the firm about their experience there and their opinion on how the firm encourages diversity. While this will result in more candid information if you can be referred to them by someone they know, feel free to simply look up attorneys, particularly former associates and partners. Any connection is better than none, so if you speak to an attorney you cold contacted, ask them if they know anyone that

<sup>1</sup> <https://mcca.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-Vault-MCCA-Law-Firm-Diversity-Survey-Report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/hypothetical\\_legal\\_memo\\_demonstrates\\_unconscious\\_biases](https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/hypothetical_legal_memo_demonstrates_unconscious_biases)

might be willing to share their opinion, and then contact that person and let them know who referred you. The “Past company” search on LinkedIn can be useful to find these people. While cold contacting people can seem intimidating, particularly by the neurodiverse, keep in mind most attorneys generally enjoy sharing their opinions and talking about themselves. Use the format of initial contact that you feel most comfortable with, but you will gain more useful information if you eventually speak to them by phone or in person. Candid information rarely comes in written form. For instance, you might send a very short e-mail or LinkedIn message introducing yourself, indicating who referred you (if applicable), explaining your purpose for contacting them (i.e. you received an offer/interview from a past firm of theirs), asking if there’s a time you could call them to discuss their experience at the firm, and thanking them for their time. If they are in a field you’re interested in or now hold a position you may want to be in someday, this is a good opportunity to also ask professional questions. You can ask them what they think was valuable in getting where they are, what they enjoy about the role, and any advice they could share with you on how to end up there.

Aside from a prestigious clerkship, for a first position, Big Law typically opens the most doors. You can always leave, but it’s far more difficult to get in after you’ve been practicing. I’ve seen and heard of too many instances where candidates for in-house and other positions were much better qualified, but lost out to another candidate based solely on their Big Law experience. Unfortunately, employers frequently seem to look for reasons to pass on well qualified underrepresented attorneys. Give them as few as possible.

### **3. Work on Building a Positive Reputation Early**

First impressions are important and even more so for diverse attorneys. That should not be confused with thinking that you’re expected to know much early on. The firm will understand that new attorneys need training and you should always ask questions if you’re unsure of your assignment or expected work product. You can best show your worth early on through willingness to work, positive attitude (including taking criticism well), and polish. Don’t be afraid to work nights and weekends and cancel plans if you have the mental bandwidth to bill more. You’re establishing your reputation and banking goodwill for later use.

Accept that for the first couple of years of practice, work-life balance will likely heavily favor work. When creating a work product such as a memo, take time to check other memos done previously for or by that partner in order to mimic the style and format. You would be surprised at how much smarter a memo looks when it’s in a format that you like and are familiar with. Carefully proofread your work product—it may be helpful to return to it on another day for a fresh look, especially if you’re neurodiverse. Sometimes you may want to go over an entire work product multiple times, particularly if you keep

finding errors with each scan. Do not rely on your superiors to proofread your work, even if they are reviewing it. On the contrary, don't be afraid to correct errors and typos made by your partner, they will greatly appreciate it. Do not fear that correcting errors in work products by your superiors would make you appear arrogant, when instead it almost always makes them believe you're more reliable and helpful. All of this will take a lot of work time. Do not be afraid to bill all of it unless and until you start hearing comments that you're taking too long. First and second year associates are expected to take sometimes an order of magnitude longer to do tasks than more experienced attorneys. You bill at a much lower rate for a reason and partners can write down time. When you do receive compliments, accept them graciously and do not dismiss them or downplay your good work in an attempt to seem modest.

If you build a reputation early on as a hard worker with polished work product, it will help shield you from criticism in the future during leaves of absence and the occasional mistake. If partners rarely catch a typo or blatant error when reviewing your work early on, they'll be less apt to look for them in the future. This is a good thing. There is rarely a large legal document that doesn't have a mistake somewhere in it. Don't train your superiors to look for your mistakes or they'll find them, even when you make fewer mistakes than colleagues and your mistakes aren't material.

#### **4. Make Connections or Specialize**

Your survival at a firm depends on whether you can get work and that can depend on your ability to make connections. Make use of firm mentorship and diversity programs. Attend company retreats, firm events, and affinity group meetings. This may even include joining legal groups outside of your firm, especially if it counts among its members attorneys from your firm that you'd like to work alongside. Particularly in your first year or two, cast a wide net. You can start cutting activities later once you get a feel for what's productive for you.

Spend time and effort making connections with partners that can supply you work, but don't try to force commonalities where there simply are none. If there is a partner that gives you work but you simply have nothing in common, concentrate on making their life easier by doing great work and going the extra mile for them and their clients. Other than feeder partners, spend time building relationships with people you get along with best.

Work can frequently come from fellow associates who know of a project that needs extra hands or who can refer you to their feeder partners. Peers are also future clients. Perhaps one of the few advantages of being a diverse attorney is that when connecting with other diverse firm attorneys, you're connecting with attorneys who have a higher rate than average of going in-house over being partner. Use that to your advantage. Make friends. Ask other attorneys to lunch. In-house attorneys often pick their outside counsel and they'll remember you if you worked well together or if you're still close.

If socializing isn't your strong point, consider specializing in something that has, or will have, high demand. This can be something rare within your firm or generally in the market. Keep an ear or eye out for new legal problems. Perhaps a new law, rule, or regulation is causing concern or an agency is enforcing something they haven't before. If you can do something that few others can do, they'll be more inclined to search you out or work with you even if you have little in common. Working on the cutting edge can also be very fulfilling. Even then you still should find ways to make sure your specialty becomes known both in and out of the firm.

## **5. Keep Your Eye Open for Better Opportunities**

You may have a career plan, but don't be afraid to jump on an opportunity. The job market can ebb and flow, making opportunities suddenly available at your skill level that weren't only a short time ago. Attorneys who have only practiced a couple of years in Big Law can suddenly find they have excellent in-house opportunities in the right job market. If that's where you want to be eventually, don't wait unless you have a good reason.

While leaving for something great is ideal, it's often more important to leave something bad. If you are having difficulties finding work generally (or the type of work you want) in times where work should be reasonably available, imagine your situation if the market suddenly turns. If you were barely getting by when work is plentiful, count on being let go when times are actually tough. This may not be a reflection of you or your work. The unfortunate truth is that this is the most common reason diverse attorneys leave Big Law. Many attorneys find a better quality of life at medium sized firms where the billing requirements are lower and it's often easier to establish a work pipeline. Where Big Law often keeps a large stable of associates, medium offices typically hire who they need with every hire slated to work under particular partners. It's still beneficial to start in Big Law if you can, but don't be afraid to leave it. Once you have Big Law on your resume, it's feasible to try something else out and return.



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Jackee is a 2012 Seattle University School of Law graduate and current partner at Miller Nash. In her practice, she helps local governments navigate all aspects of the eminent domain process, inverse condemnation, regulatory takings, and the associated negotiation and valuation. Over the last decade, she has been involved in hundreds of public projects in the Pacific Northwest, large and small. She has extensive mediation experience and is known for resolving cases short of the courtroom. When litigation is unavoidable, Jackee has successfully first-chaired multimillion-dollar cases in Washington courts. Her clients include local transit authorities, counties, cities, special districts, utility companies, and private property owners. She regularly works with outside experts, such as appraisers, engineers, architects, developers, land planners, relocation agents, title/escrow officers, and environmental consultants to assure the best possible outcome for her clients.

Jackee is a frequent guest speaker on legal issues involving eminent domain law and has served as author and editor for a number of state and national legal treaties on the topic. Since 2015, Jackee has been selected every year for inclusion as a Washington Super Lawyer—Rising Star. She has also been named to Best Lawyers: Ones to Watch since 2021.

Jackee is a thought leader on diversity and co-chairs Miller Nash's Diversity & Inclusion Committee and Summer Associate Program. She is a relentless champion for those underrepresented in law and seeks to bring true equity to the firm. By challenging the systems that have kept select groups from succeeding, Jackee is helping to ensure diverse attorneys have the opportunity to flourish, and are sufficiently recognized and compensated for their contributions. She provides strategic DEI leadership, develops key initiatives, provides hiring and promotion oversight, and mentors diverse attorneys.

Jackee is also an executive board member of the Loren Miller Bar Association and a Trustee for the Federal Bar Association of the Western District of Washington.

Outside of the office, Jackee spends her free time enjoying life and creating memories with her six-year-old daughter, Jaya. She is an avid DIYer and enjoys beautifying spaces. She is also a gym and health enthusiast. When she can get away, Jackee enjoys last-minute trips to remote locations, unplugging in unspoiled locations where the beauty of the environment replenishes her energy.



# What I Wish I Had Known About Law Firms

**Author: Jackee Walker**

## **1. General**

Law school does not teach you how to be a practicing attorney and does not prepare you for law firm life. If you are considering working in a law firm, I encourage you to reach out to as many firm lawyers as you can to learn about their experiences, practices, and to get a sense of what being a lawyer in a law firm actually means. Most lawyers are happy to talk about themselves, so don't be afraid to reach out.

Before interviewing at various Seattle firms for a 1L Diversity Fellowship summer associate position, I had never stepped foot inside a law firm. I do not come from a family of attorneys and had no clue what I was getting into taking a position at a law firm. I was hired by Graham & Dunn, now Miller Nash, as a 1L Diversity Fellow, summered there for both my 1L and 2L summers, was an associate for seven years, and made partner after a full seven years of practice. I was the first 1L Diversity Fellow and first Black woman partner in Miller Nash's Seattle office to make partner. While making partner as a Black woman is a huge accomplishment, the journey to partnership was nothing short of brutal. Before you blindly decide to work at a law firm, it's important to understand what you are signing up for. If you are okay trading your freedom of time for money and battling against ego, hierarchy, and delusion, keep reading.

Learn self-validation. Law firm environments are tough, intense, and can be quite toxic, especially for people of color and those from marginalized backgrounds. If you can learn to love yourself and develop confidence, you will be better equipped to navigate the practice, politics, and environment.

Generally, there are 4 types of law firms: (1) solo practitioner; (2) boutique firms; (3) midsize firms; and (4) big law. I encourage you to do your research on each type as the compensation, billable hour requirement, culture, hierarchy, and support staff will vary at each. For example, mid-size and big law firms represent primarily large, institutional clients on the defense side, in a number of practice areas, and require associates to bill between 1700-2300 hours per year.

The only thing that matters in a law firm is how much money you bring in the door. The amount of power and autonomy you have is directly correlated to your book of business and cash receipts. Do excellent/detailed work, bill a lot of hours, be extremely responsive, find a niche practice, and generate clients! If you do not want to market yourself and bring in clients, a law firm may not be right the choice for you. Work/Life balance doesn't typically exist for law firm associates.

## **2. How to Get Hired**

If you want to obtain a summer associate position at a big law firm and you attend a low ranked school, you are going to: (1) need to be at the top of your class; or (2) hustle in order to have any shot. Nevertheless, law students from most law schools can find positions at mid-size and smaller firms in most cases, as these firms place less emphasis on grades. But generally, grades do matter to law firms.

### **a. Summer Associate Positions**

The easiest way to obtain a full-time associate position at a law firm is by participating in a firm's summer associate program, which generally occurs the summer between your 2L and 3L years. If the firm has a 1L Diversity Fellowship, you would summer between your 1L and 2L years. Most mid-size and big Seattle law firms offer a 1L or 2L Diversity Fellowship.<sup>1</sup> The most common way to get a law firm job is for rising 2Ls to participate in their school's on-campus recruiting program (OCI).

### **b. Gregoire Fellows Program**

Another potential way into a law firm is through the Gregoire Fellows Program, offered at Seattle University and University of Washington.<sup>2</sup> The Fellowship seeks diverse applicants who are interested in exploring careers in the corporate legal sector.

Fellows spend the summer following their 1L year working between a major corporate law firm and either a Seattle-based corporation or government agency.

If you are considering applying for the Gregoire Fellows Program, keep in mind that the law firms participating in the Program may be less likely to extend you an offer to return for your 2L summer. This is because they are not required to make any additional offer beyond your 1L summer. Since the law firms don't get to pick the Fellows they host, they have less buy in than they do with their own 1L Diversity Fellow and OCI hires.

### **c. Google Legal Summer Institute (LSI)**

Google Legal Summer Institute (LSI) invites underrepresented 2L law school students to spend the first week of their 2L summer at Google's headquarters followed by a full summer associateship with one of LSI's partner law firms.<sup>3</sup> LSI

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.law.seattleu.edu/careers/for-students-alumni/diversity-scholarships-fellowships/>  
<http://salra-seattle.org/diversity-fellowships/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.law.seattleu.edu/careers/for-students-alumni/gregoire-fellows-program/>  
<https://www.law.uw.edu/careers/gregoire>

<sup>3</sup> <https://buildyourfuture.withgoogle.com/programs/lsi>

aims to improve access to in-house careers at tech companies by expanding opportunities and removing barriers for underrepresented talent in the legal industry.

### **3. How to Succeed as a Summer Associate**

Your goal from day one should be to do what it takes to get an offer to return for a 2L summer or as a full-time associate. Be so good that the firm would be foolish not to extend you an offer. Law firms are looking for rock stars. Make them excited to hire you.

Law firms do not expect summer associates to know much about practice. They understand you are in law school and that law school doesn't teach you how to practice. However, law firms do expect summer associates to be trainable, curious, know how to research using Westlaw or LexisNexis, deliver work product free of typos/grammatical errors, use correct legal citations, meet deadlines, have common sense, and use good judgment. I can't tell you how many summer associates I have interacted with that forget they are on a ten week interview. Drinking too much during summer events and not carrying yourself in a professional manner is the quickest way to wear out your welcome.

Do not miss deadlines. Lawyers live in a world of deadlines. Court deadlines must be met no matter what is happening in your life. If deadlines are missed, you are exposing yourself and the law firm to a malpractice suit. You do not want to develop a reputation for missing deadlines. If you do, you will have a hard time getting work throughout the firm.

While some deadlines change unexpectedly, others are absolute. Before tackling any assignment, you must understand the relevant deadlines. If your assigning attorney gives you a deadline, meet it. In the event you are unable to meet it, as soon as you know you cannot meet the deadline, communicate that to the assigning attorney. Give them as much heads-up as possible so they can get someone else on the assignment.

The fact that the firm may take you to summer social events should not control how you perceive the summer experience. You must determine your priorities and plan accordingly. By far, the most frequent problems encountered by summer associates are the challenges presented by handling multiple assignments or meeting tough deadlines.

As a summer associate, you will be judged on your work product, how likable you are, the connections you made over the summer, and whether you fit a need of the firm.

While it's difficult to determine your specific practice area after only ten weeks in a summer program, if you want an offer at the end of the summer, you should be trying to find a home on a practice team. Being a junior associate without a home

is the quickest way out of a firm. It is critical you learn which practice areas make the firm the most money and are sustainable year after year. You should find out which practice areas are busy and have a need for a first year associate. Be proactive and get to know people and the business of the firm. Your chances of obtaining a full-time offer will increase as you develop good relationships with attorneys (that matter) in the firm. I recommend you find someone in the firm you like working with and that has enough work to keep you busy as an associate. You are going to need someone to teach you how to practice and fill your plate with billable work.

The bigger the law firm, the bigger the summer class will be, and the more offers for full-time employment the firm will make.

Keep in mind that life as a 1st year associate will not be like life as a summer associate. The pay will be the same, but you will be working much longer hours, will be under much more stress, and will have to quickly learn how to actually practice law. The handholding that occurs during the summer does not exist for full-time associates.

#### **4. Firm Politics and Navigating as a Person of Color**

Law firms are still very white, male-dominated spaces and expect people of color to assimilate. I was the only Black woman in my firm for many years. I have never had a senior Black woman mentor at my firm. There was no one ahead of me to aspire to be like. No one to teach me how to develop clients as a Black woman. I am still figuring that out on my own. When I was a 1st year associate, the firm asked me what it could do to help me develop, my response was to hire a Black woman partner. Instead of considering how important this was for my development, the firm's response was that I could be the first Black woman partner.

Most policies in law firms support white males. Most events cater to white culture. Male attorneys have called me "aggressive" and an "agitator." I was told I have "behavioral problems" for being honest, and I was called the "poster child for diversity" during the speech celebrating my accomplishment of making partner. I get tasked with the heavy burden of carrying the diversity load for the firm and I am not compensated for it. Clients do not think I look like a lawyer, and courts typically mistake me for a paralegal. Being a Black woman in a law firm is hard.

Law firm politics are difficult, confusing, and frustrating. Inside of a law firm, not only do you have to worry about learning how to practice, meeting deadlines, servicing your clients, and opposing counsel trying to get you, but you are constantly under threat from your own associates and partners who may try to undermine you in the eyes of your colleagues, clients, and others.

Whether you are a summer associate, associate, or partner, there are certain political rules that must be observed inside of law firms if you are going to be successful. Numerous people of color leave the practice of law because they make political mistakes.

**a. Colleagues, Not Friends**

The other attorneys in the firm are your colleagues, not your friends. Do not tell everyone everything. They do not need to see your cards. There are no secrets in a law firm, so whatever you choose to share, be comfortable with everyone knowing. Find a couple of people you can trust, and stick with them. However, it is crucial you develop relationships with the attorneys in the firm that have the most influence and the biggest clients. You do not have to share your life secret to do this. For the first few years of practice, attend as many firm events and happy hours as you can to get to know people. Once you've put in the time and those relationships are developed, you can be more selective on attending social events. For example, in my first 4 years of practice, I attended weekly happy hours and almost every firm event. I became a mom in year 4 and significantly reduced the amount of events I would attend. I had developed such strong relationships that it didn't matter if I was present or not. After making partner, I further reduced the amount of firm events I would attend. I now only attend events with clients or those that are beneficial to my practice.

**5. How to Succeed as an Associate**

**a. Make Your Hours**

In exchange for your salary, you are expected to meet your firm's billable hour requirement. Mid-size and big law firms require associates to bill between 1700-2300 hours per year.

At the end of every month, and at some firms every week, a report showing what each timekeeper has billed is published to the partners. Never be on the bottom of the hours report. As a person of color, you will be judged harder than your white peers. If you continue to be at the bottom of the hours report, you will become the topic of discussion among partners and will eventually be fired. If you meet your hours, partners won't be able to criticize you too much.

It requires a significant amount of time to meet your hours.<sup>4</sup> If your billable hour requirement is 1800 per year, that equates to 150 billable hours per month, and 7.5 billable hours per day. In order to achieve 7.5 billable hours per day, you'll need to be working about 10+ hours per day. This extra 3 hours includes all of the non-billable time you spend attending lunches, firm meetings, etc.

<sup>4</sup> [Yale Law School Career Development Office The Truth About the Billable Hour](#)

**b. Develop Credibility**

Your reputation and professional credibility in a law firm is crucial to your success. Establishing credibility isn't something you can achieve overnight, but there are several steps you can take to start building a strong reputation for your firm:

**i. The assigning attorney is your client**

Until you have your own clients, treat the attorney assigning you work as your client. You want to leave good impressions with the attorneys you work with. If you don't, you will develop a reputation as being unreliable and having poor work product. This is another quick way out of a law firm.

**ii. Have excellent work product**

Be insanely meticulous about the detail of your work. You can control how your work product looks and whether or not it is free of typos, grammatical errors, uses proper citations, has accurate case information, etc. You must be attentive to every document you create. No typos in subject lines and in emails. Put the periods in the right place. Have the same amount of spaces between each sentence. Put the correct name of the parties in the pleadings. Really strive for consistency.

When a partner assigns you work and it comes back sloppy, the partner has to spend a ton of extra time fixing your work. Going forward, that partner is going to be paranoid that whatever you turn in is going to have mistakes and they won't trust your work or trust you to take ownership over anything. Consequently, you won't get more substantive work opportunities. Paying attention to detail and submitting work product free of basic error is the quickest way to develop trust and get more substantive projects.

**iii. Every draft is a final draft**

Even if an assigning attorney asks for a draft, you should never submit a draft. Assigning attorneys expect client-ready work product. Every assignment you submit should be treated as a final draft. Do not submit work product with highlights, questions, blanks, poor formatting, etc. Treat each draft as a final draft. If your work product cannot be sent to a client, do not send it to the assigning attorney.

**iv. Work hard and be coachable**

The best associates are the ones that have a desire to work hard and get better, and are willing to help out on whatever is needed. The associates that take an opportunity as far as the partner/client will let them, and are always willing to jump in and help, are the associates that succeed.

Coachable associates are eager learners, willing to learn about ways to improve their performance. They embrace new perspectives and ideas from others. In fact, they often seek out feedback. Being willing to receive feedback and take criticism is the biggest component of coachability. Highly effective coachable associates do not view feedback as an insult to their character or abilities and do not make excuses for their mistakes. Instead, coachable associates give thanks for the feedback they receive without being sensitive or dramatic.

Mess up on something new. If you continue to make the same mistakes, the assigning attorney will stop coming to you for help.

**v. Have a positive attitude**

No one wants to work with an associate with a poor attitude and an associate who constantly complains. Become a “yes” person and be willing to try new things. Ask the senior attorneys how you can help them out. Volunteer to take the lead on new assignments. Be kind to everyone and genuine, and do not gossip constantly or spread rumors.

**vi. Over deliver**

Think about what the final work product is being used for, anticipate the needs of the assigning attorney or client, and over deliver when you can. For example, when I was a first year associate, I was the 3rd-chair attorney on a jury trial. I was responsible for the pre-trial motion practice, jury instructions, and running the exhibits during trial. I was not responsible for any witness examinations. After a bit of a rough day for our case, and without be asked, I decided to meet with one of our experts who was set to testify the next day. None of the other attorneys on the trial attended the meeting. The expert and I went over the expert’s testimony and brainstormed ways we could get our case back on track. After the meeting, I turned my notes into direct examination questions with exhibit references for the lead attorney. To my surprise, the attorney used my examination questions the next day at trial. I continued to work with that attorney for the next decade.

Another way to over deliver is to get things done early, without being asked. For example, once it becomes clear that a matter is going to trial, check with the assigning attorney to see what trial preparation you can get started on (exhibits, ER 904, jury instructions, witness examinations, motions in limine, trial brief).

**c. Find out who the “Important People” and Top Clients are**

Find out who the important people are in the firm. These are usually the people with the biggest book of business, represent the firm’s top clients, and carry an immense amount of decision-making influence. Build strong relationships with these attorneys and learn from them. Better yet, take an interest in their practice and find ways to help them.

**d. Committee Work**

I asked to be on my law firm’s hiring committee when I was a 1st year associate. I have been serving as a recruiter for the firm ever since. This was one of the best decisions I made. While I have spent countless non-billable hours recruiting for the firm, I was able to directly shape the firm’s hiring practices, culture, and hire more attorneys of color. I was also able to build deep relationships with firm management. If you are looking for a way to get involved as an associate, helping with recruiting has some significant benefits. If you don’t like the people you work with, hire some that you do.

**e. Bonuses**

**i. Automatic Bonus**

If you meet your billable hour requirement, you will receive an automatic bonus. Each firm has a different bonus policy so be sure to understand yours.

**ii. Discretionary Bonus**

You may be eligible to receive a discretionary bonus recognition of extraordinary efforts and contributions to firm success that are not already reflected in your billable hour statistics or otherwise reflected in your compensation.

Discretionary bonuses are not guaranteed and should not be expected. Your firm has the discretion to give an associate a discretionary bonus, and the amount of any such bonus. To be considered for a discretionary bonus, the associate usually must demonstrate a contribution at a level significantly above what is expected of an associate with their years of experience.

Examples of specific reasons to award an associate a discretionary bonus could include:

1. Extraordinary efforts to advance the firm's profile in an important client industry or practice area by gaining practice expertise or representative knowledge of a particular industry, practice area, and/or client at a level significantly above what is expected based on years of experience.
2. Exceptional commitment to client service and client-relationship building that prompts positive feedback from clients, is recognized in client feedback interviews or surveys, and/or that results in new client growth or demonstrated client retention efforts.
3. Significant involvement in business development efforts to secure new or expanded work.
4. Extraordinary commitment to or advancement of the firm's diversity and inclusion efforts.
5. Significant recognition, awards, or distinctions from professional associations.
6. Building the firm's reputation through substantial community engagement.
7. Significant and sustained involvement in firm leadership, management, or committee work.
8. Extraordinary commitment to pro bono work demonstrated through significant efforts and/or outcome in a pro bono matter or matters.
9. Significant time spent in the recruitment of new attorneys or groups of attorneys.
10. Superlative efforts toward mentoring or training others.
11. Extraordinary financial contributions not otherwise provided for in the automatic bonus.

## **6. Making Partner**

### **a. General**

Partnership track is generally between 7-10 years, but can take up to 15 years in big law. While partnership isn't everything and isn't for everyone, for me, things got better after I made partner. Unfortunately, many partners think associates don't matter. When I made partner, I no longer had to answer to partners and gained a massive amount of autonomy. Three years into partnership, I was finally able to enjoy the fruits of 10 years of hard work. I also experienced a calmness in my practice. I took trips to Greece, Mexico, Paris, and Italy—all in one year. Being able to work remotely has been a game changer for me.

The quickest way to partnership is to generate your own clients. In a mid-size law firm, to be considered for equity partner, you'll need to have a book of business that generates between \$500k-\$900k in cash receipts. Big law requires between \$1MM-\$2MM+. Generate enough revenue and you'll likely make equity partner.

If you want to be a partner in law firm, start acting like one on day one. While billing hours as an associate is important, it is also important to develop your own book of business. Business development should also start on day one. One of the worst things you can do as an associate is put all of your eggs in one basket and dedicate your associate years to serving another partner's client. When it comes time to be considered for partnership, you will have no clients of your own, and the partner who you spent your career helping may not be willing to share client credit. Also, having your own clients is incredibly freeing. You are now the boss.

**b. Equity vs. Non-Equity**

There are two main types of partnerships within a law firm, equity and non-equity. The main difference between equity and non-equity is that equity partners take the most risk and for doing so, get the most rewards. This typically creates a two-tier compensation system for partners.

Many law firms offer both equity and non-equity partnerships. Looking from the outside, clients are unlikely to know who is an equity partner and who is a non-equity partner, as both are referred to as partner.

**i. Non-equity**

Non-equity partners do not have the same job security as equity partners and most non-equity partners receive a salary instead of partnership distributions. Both equity and non-equity attorneys can receive a base salary or draw with bonus. This depends on the firm.

**ii. Equity**

An equity partner is an owner of a law firm. Equity partners have full voting rights including: evaluating attorneys, firing, recruiting, and strategic direction of the firm. There are two ways an attorney can be invited to be an Equity Partner:

**Buy In** — Each firm has a different buy-value. It depends upon, the overall value of the firm, over-head, etc. Some firms will offer an attractive loan for an equity partner to finance the buy in. Each law firm determines how the buy-in and buy-outs are structured.

***Sweat Equity*** — How much effort and business the attorney brings to the table. The value is determined by the attorney's practice, originations, and leadership within and outside of the law firm.

Typically shares or percentage points are awarded based on the lawyer's contributions to the firm's bottom line.

**c. Criteria for Partnership Consideration**

Firms base their partnership decisions on a variety of objective and subjective factors. These criteria derive from the attributes of a good partner and generally include the following:

1. Highest quality legal work.
2. Technical competence.
3. Good judgment.
4. Specialization and unique expertise.
5. Continuing professional growth.
6. Anticipating changes in practice and an ability to redirect into new areas.
7. Attentiveness to clients.
8. Profitability.
9. Engaging in client relationships producing material amounts of profitable work.
10. Commitment to marketing the firm as a whole rather than just one's own individual practice.
11. Engaging in delegation and training.
12. Willingness to transition clients to other attorneys in the firm.
13. Providing leadership and judgment in complex legal matters.
14. Teamwork.
15. Leadership in development of firm departments and practice teams.
16. Participation in and contributions to firm management.
17. Participation in firm marketing.
18. Participation in civic and community affairs.
19. Good firm citizenship.
20. Owner mentality and entrepreneurial spirit.