

# Legal Career: What Does A First-Year Law Associate Do?

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You won't work this hard since your first year of law school. Now that you've got that Juris Doctorate and soul singing bar exam out of the way, it's time to get down to the business of lawyering. Alan Dershowitz, scoot over.

Not so fast. First, you've got to learn how to be an attorney. In learning how to be an attorney, what does a first-year associate do?

Usually, first-year associate's support the more experienced attorneys. To be honest, there will be quite a bit of grunt work, but since you don't know how to be an attorney yet, this is probably a good thing. Working under heavy supervision, you will begin the painstaking mission of building your craft as an attorney.

Robert Half Legal, a placement firm, posted a succinct [job description](#) of a first-year associate:

## Typical duties of a first-year associate

- Researching and analyzing the law on complex issues and writing briefs for submission to a supervising lawyer in the firm;
- Analyzing and summarizing complicated legal documents, including contracts, and suggesting alterations to those documents;
- Performing discovery of various electronically stored data and hard copies of information in preparation for litigation; and
- Performing due diligence in legal matters concerning contracts, agreements and mergers and acquisitions.

You will be the boots on the ground for senior attorneys, getting the facts of a matter down cold, and getting all the relevant information to the supervising attorney and team. As you get a little more experience under your belt, you'll be tasked with more responsibility.

## Minding Billable Hours

As a first-year associate, you will be expected to bill from 1,700 hours to 2,000 a year. This means coming in early and leaving late, with some weekends thrown in. Of course, you will actually work more hours than what you bill, as some tasks and day to day chores are not billable. At any rate, it is critical that you record and submit your time through timekeeping systems. You do not want to be left scrambling at the end of the month trying to remember what you were doing two or three weeks ago.

Getting assignments is of key importance to a first-year associate. You might have to be rather aggressive in asking for assignments. Being politely aggressive is just one of the many skills a first-year associate must learn.

It is generally better to get more work than not enough work. This is another area where you don't want to be scrambling at the end of a time period, in this case, the end of the year. On a day to day basis you want to be sure you are following a budget of billable hours. If you find yourself with too much work, talk to your supervising attorneys.

## Office Politics

A few words of advice are in order. During your first year as an associate, you want to begin to build good habits. Some of these include refraining from joining the gossip pool. No one likes a gossip and you very much need to engender respect as these are your foundation years.

Likewise, respect everyone, from the managing partner to the housekeeping staff, and especially to the support staff. In addition to being the right thing to do, support staff know the ropes in the firm better than anyone and can help you in building a strong career. Of course, don't be nice to them just because they can help you!

Don't complain about the long hours, the possible drudgery, your associates and especially your senior attorneys. Everyone is in the same boat or has been in that boat. Woman up!

Get to know your colleagues. Network as much as possible. Attend firm functions where you can socialize with various members of the firm as well as clients.

## Conclusion

What does a first-year law associate do? Learn to be an attorney. Unless you hang out your own shingle, you won't be dropped off at the deep end. Instead, you will be given the chance to start practicing what you learned in school, to experience what it means to be an attorney in terms of invested time in your career and to gain insight into the important role that lawyers play in society.

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