

The New Attorney: A Guide to Surviving Your First Year

Article By:

Jaliz Maldonado

The Conveyor Belt Called Life

So, you graduated law school and passed the bar. Congrats!! By now, you more than likely mapped out your entire career and everything is going your way. No? It's okay. One of the best [ways](#) to succeed as an attorney in the first years as well as in your entire career is by having a game plan and then realizing that your game plan is ever changing.

Life is synonymous with a conveyor belt. You have your "game plan," and as you're walking towards it, the conveyor belt is also moving underneath you. Before becoming discouraged, realize that drive, persistence, and perseverance define you. Now, let's get back to the regularly scheduled program.

The secret to success in any profession and especially in the legal profession is having a long-term strategic goal for what you want to accomplish and utilizing appropriate short-term tactics to achieve that goal. It is essential to develop outstanding work habits that will get you noticed by your peers and those appointed over you. Always try to be proactive and never do the bare minimum. But you know this.

Never forget to Network

Making necessary contacts within and outside of the organization. Where you work is vital as an attorney, however, nurturing your network of contacts is your lifeline.

Networking is one of the biggest boons to an attorney's career, but it alone won't transform a lackluster associate into a partner. However, it can catapult competent attorneys to the front of the line when an exciting, high-profile case ordeal is being staffed, or promotions are being considered. So with whom should you be networking? Working in proximity will make you inexorably intertwined with the associates and partners in your practice.

By attending firm events, an attorney will also have a chance to meet other members of the firm, which is a beneficial thing in case such person wants to switch practice areas in the future. Networking within the firm may also allow the attorney to get introduced to different high profile clients who will help to develop an ability to attract and retain future business contacts. Be kind to everyone you encounter, including the support staff and even the building staff generally because it is a reflection of who you are and how you view the world. Your reputation is the most important asset

you have as an attorney, so build a positive reputation with everyone you encounter.

Being too passive in asking for assignments is often a stumbling block for those attorneys who are not as aggressive as their counterparts. Each situation needs to be evaluated individually regarding firm processes and the personalities of the partners you are working with. Thus, it is imperative to get this type of information before you begin working so that you can start off on the “right foot” and avoid having to panic about a lack of billable hours later in the year. Managing stress is one of the key ingredients in successful first years at a law firm. When your daily life starts to feel overwhelming, you will need to remember to pace and center yourself amidst all the stress of your professional and personal lives. As long as you are patient with your development as an attorney and make it a priority to develop your personal life outside of the firm, you should be able to maintain a good work/life balance in your first year.

Be the team player you want on your team

It is important to be a team player in any work environment, but especially in a law firm setting. You will need to establish good relationships with both your partners and fellow associates. If you are hoping to make partner one day, you want to demonstrate from the start that you are a team player and that you will take the initiative in finding and taking on work similar to how partners seek out clients. If firms see that you are proactive and passionate about your work, they are more likely to entrust you with important roles and interesting cases. Ideally, you will want to foster the reputation of being the person to go to if something needs to be done well. Also, if you are open to taking projects that are less interesting and working on days that are undesirable (like weekends) once in a while, you will truly endear yourself to your colleagues. Not only will this extra effort be reflected well in your relationships, but it will hopefully translate into recognition, promotion, and bonuses from the firm.

Furthermore being a new associate can be mentally draining, by investing some of your time in the firm, you will likely gain more respect as an associate who is trying to contribute to the firms’ overall success.

Conclusion

There’s no worse feeling than the feeling of trying to stay afloat, yet sinking. It may be overwhelming at first. You’re not where you want to be (as of yet), you’re at the bottom of the food chain, and you’re probably thinking, “What did law school teach me?” But you’ll be ok. You were born to do this and you WILL do this. You are every bit of the Superstar you were meant to be (and dream of). Sleep easy and dream BIG (never lose sight of your goals).

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