

CHAPTER 20

SUCCESS TIPS: JOINING A FIRM

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Learning the Ropes 2020

Success Tips for Lawyers Joining Firms

The Top 10 List – Things You Need to Do to Be a Successful Associate

1. Do good work.

- This is the minimum.
- A “draft” document is a myth. Every “draft” finished should be polished and complete.
- Make yourself available.
- Learning your craft is an investment in yourself.

2. Communication skills / take responsibility for mistakes.

- Adapt your style to your client’s, your staff, and the partner-in-charge.
- Mistakes are expected, but inform the partner-in-charge as soon as possible.
- Ask questions. The more direction you get from the partner, the higher quality the work product and the more efficient you will be.

3. Perspective—be client focused.

- Everyone is your client—associates, partners, and the firm’s actual clients.
- Be client focused and put yourself in their shoes—what would they want?
- Take the initiative.
- The Portland legal community is very small.

4. Understand that law is a business.

- Understand the finances.
- Add value.
- Manage and bill your time –learn how to write effective billing narratives.
- Have a system and do it consistently.

5. Have a plan and set goals.

- Set short-term and long-term goals that are measurable.
- Make sure your goals are realistic (equity vs. nonequity partners; myth vs. fact).
- Put those goals down on paper in a career development plan.
- Revisit the plan regularly with someone who will hold you accountable.
- One of your goals should be to build a book of business.

6. Build relationships.

- Clients can come from anywhere.
- Follow your passions.
- Think of rainmaking as a team activity.
- Don’t forget internal / existing clients.
- Seek out champions and mentors; they are different roles.

7. Work well with staff.

- Learn how to delegate.
- Support staff talk to one another and between firms.
- The support staff will know more than you do. Accept it and get over any attorney vs. legal assistant hierarchical misconceptions.
- Set your boundaries with the support staff.

8. Understand the culture and politics of the firm.

- Pay attention to and understand the firm culture—whether as a potential applicant or as an associate already working there—and remember that culture may vary substantially between practice groups.
- Be yourself while also being professional and in touch with the firm’s culture.
- Seek mentors within the firm to help you understand the firm’s culture and navigate its political landscape.

9. Take care of yourself.

- Drink water and get sleep.
- Find ways to combine personal health and professional development.
- Don’t feel guilty about spending a little time or money on self-care.

10. It’s a career, not just a job.

- Think of yourself as a portable asset.
- Don’t burn bridges

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Success Tips: Joining a Firms Additional Resources

American Bar Association:

Young Lawyers Division: http://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers.html

Publications: http://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers/publications.html

21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Building Challenge

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/labor_law/membership/equal_opportunity/

Oregon State Bar Oregon New Lawyers Division: <http://www.osbar.org/onld>

Multnomah Bar Association:

Multnomah Lawyer newsletter: <https://mbabar.org/about/newsletter.html>

Young Lawyers Section: <https://mbabar.org/YLSI>

Oregon Attorney Assistance Program: www.aaap.org

inSight newsletter: <https://aaap.org/in-sight-archive/>

The Curmudgeon's Guide to Practicing Law, by Mark Herrmann