

13 Lucky Tips for the Young Associate: Staples for Survival and Success

Congratulations! You've passed the bar exam and now it's time to begin your career as an attorney. You'll be starting in the same manner as many respected attorneys have, with the innocuous title of "first year" associate and perhaps with the goal of one day becoming a great attorney yourself. How does one make that transition from "first year" associate to renowned attorney? It doesn't happen automatically and before one becomes a great attorney one needs to become a great associate.

Having been a part of a professional services firm for over 30 years and having consulted with many other professional firms over that time, I have studied what separates those young professionals who thrive and reach their goals from those who don't. What follows is a compilation of tips to young associates, none of which are purely original, but all of which still have great value when applied.

1. Make Yourself Valuable-develop a specialized expertise currently needed in the firm; continue to hone those skills with the goal of being on the "short list" of those with your particular expertise both internally to the firm and externally to outside referral sources. Become "notorious" within the legal and social community for your specialized expertise.

2. Manage Your Time and Resources-don't "recreate the wheel". As a young attorney, you will be asked to do what probably has been done before. Seek those people out who know the process. Use forms, briefs, etc. already in existence as applicable and "tailor" them to your particular task. Utilize the experience of all members of the firm, including the support and clerical staff. They will appreciate you more when you take the time to ask for their help.

3. Display a "Sense of Urgency" and "Sweat the Details"-this suggests to the partners and other senior attorneys that your involvement provides a certain comfort level and that any matter that you are involved in will be handled in a "buttoned up" manner.

4. Know the "Rules" for Appropriate Demeanor and Professionalism -both in the courtroom and in the firm conference room. Everyone you come in contact with deserves some level of respect.

5. Recognize and Act on Opportunities - display your initiative and your potential to contribute to the firm both internally and externally.

6. Develop an Awareness of How the Firm is Managed as a Business- recognize the importance of timely reporting, billing and collecting. Learn the impact of what you do on the practice as a business. Be aware of the firm's long term mission and business strategy and then do what you can to become a part of it.

7. Create and Develop Your Own Network -of other professionals, business people and friends for support and referrals. Become involved in the bar association, trade associations, community and civic organizations. Be aware that everyone you come in contact with is a potential referral source to either you or your firm. One never knows where the next referral will come from.

8. Don't be Afraid to Speak Up, Ask for Help, or Acknowledge Your Mistakes-keep an open mind and seek honest feedback and dialogue. Others in the firm (both attorneys and support staff) will usually take whatever actions necessary to make the firm (and you in the process) look good. Don't forget to acknowledge these contributions. Know the firm's expectations, and then exceed them.

9. Stay on the "Radar Screen"- if you have something to say- say it; a question to ask-ask it ; be an active participant in the firm's activities and in its' plan for growth and development.

10. Find Your Mentor in the Firm - a senior attorney you feel you can ask questions to without being fear of being judged. Most great lawyers are happy to share the benefit of their expertise and experience with those associates who solicit it.

11. Take From the Partners-recognize the talents, habits and traits of partners that make them valuable to the firm and admirable to you as people, then make them yours.

12. Maintain Balance in Your Life-it allows you to maintain good perspective and good judgment, qualities both the firm and the clients will benefit from as well as your friends and family.

13. Keep Your Sense of Humor-as serious and difficult as practicing law can be it is extremely important to maintain your ability to laugh.

This is not rocket science. It does however provide an insight in how to best become a respected attorney. But for this information to be effective, it must be implemented.