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# **A Law Student's Guide to Strategic Career Management: *Tools for Career Decision-Making, Satisfaction and Success***

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## Part I: Introduction

Career satisfaction is rarely serendipitous. Regardless of practice area or career track, most law graduates who find their careers rewarding and meaningful have invested time and energy in managing their professional development. Research has shown that individuals spend approximately 86,000 hours of their lives working (Reardon, Lenz, Sampson, & Peterson, 2000). If you are going to spend 86,000 hours of your life working, shouldn't it be pursuing work you will find personally rewarding?

The universe of law and law related opportunities is diverse. There is no standard "law job." While some law graduates might find working as a trial attorney at a District Attorney's office incredibly stimulating, others might find it exhausting. Working as a transactional attorney at a medium-sized firm might be very gratifying for some lawyers, but not impactful enough for others. With so many choices and trajectories, it is important to take the time to self-assess while in law school. Doing so will allow you to make better educated choices about experiences, extra-curricular, and academic opportunities.

No one will care more about you and your priorities than **you!** Taking ownership of your professional development and career management at this stage of the game will have exponential benefits in the long run. Legal employers are increasingly focused on hiring law student candidates who can articulate their interests and skills in relevant and meaningful terms. Students and graduates who have chartered a path that demonstrates their stated interests and goals are more likely to begin their career in a position that aligns with their priorities. Lawyers who take ownership of their career choices and professional development are also more likely to make thoughtful decisions throughout their career, whether that's identifying areas for growth, gaining greater knowledge and increased expertise, finding and developing relationships with mentors, or and serving as mentors themselves.



## Keys to Making Good Career Decisions

1. There are many different career paths for a law graduate, and lawyers will find different roles and settings rewarding and stressful for a variety of reasons depending on their interests, preferred skills and values.
2. There is no generic legal employer. A District Attorney's office, an appellate judge and a policy shop will all require successful attorneys to exercise different skills and call upon different passions and interests.
3. Students cannot participate in every activity, competition and job fair that law school has to offer. Self-assessment can provide clarity that will allow you to act proactively and make decisions that will better align with priorities.
4. Successful students make informed, thoughtful decisions about how to spend their energy and time based on their individual definition of success and fulfillment.
5. Self-assessment, whether done through formal exercises or more informal advising, can serve as a framework or guide that you refer to as you navigate all the career and academic choices you must make while in law school and during your professional career.

## Career Development Model

Given the rapidly changing face of the legal profession it is more important than ever that law students take charge of their career and life choices during the early stages of law school. Beginning with a thoughtful self-assessment will make career research, decision-making, goal setting and your work experiences more relevant and meaningful at every career stage. The career development model below shows that the professional development sequence is a continuous cycle, and one that continues throughout the career span.



### What is Self-Assessment **and Why Does it Matter?**

Self-assessment is the process of taking stock of your preferences, skills, aptitudes, values and stressors throughout your law school career and beyond and using this self-knowledge to make smart career decisions throughout your professional life not just with respect to what job opportunities to pursue but how to make the most of opportunities. You can engage in self-assessment in many ways including:

- Taking formal assessments and engaging in exercises like the ones found in this workbook
- Talking with career and academic advisors and asking for feedback from mentors
- Asking yourself the right questions, raising your level of self-awareness and reflecting on your experiences

No one expects you to have it all figured out at the beginning of your first year of law school. Even if you think you have, your preferences may change with time and experience. That said, we strongly encourage you to carve out some space beginning in the fall of your first year and throughout law school to take a step back, engage in a variety of forms of self-assessment and use this self-knowledge to inform your career, curricular and extracurricular choices.

The intensive first year curriculum, expectations you may perceive from the law school community and from family and friends, and the front loaded nature of the first year summer job search process can make students feel like they do not have the luxury to engage in self-reflection. Skipping this important step in the career cycle could result in poor planning and decision making around which extracurricular and professional opportunities are best aligned with your professional needs, growth and development. No law student will have the time and capacity to participate in every activity, competition, course, clinic and job fair. You will have to weigh the pros and cons of various opportunities as they present themselves using what information and experience you have at any given point to make many decisions about how to direct your time and energy.

## Part II: Self-Assessment Exercises

This guide includes several self-assessment exercises to help you begin thinking about your values, skills, interests, characteristics and the attributes of your preferred work setting. After completing each of the exercises, “next steps,” will allow you to prioritize or see themes emerge that are central to you. At the end of the guide is a personal profile tool that you can use to better evaluate internships, courses and extracurricular activities. It is designed to help you test your hunches about your career drivers, get experience relevant to your particular interests and goals and help you demonstrate your interest and commitment to employers. Your needs and drivers will not be the same as the person sitting next to you, and that’s ok! Better to find the right fit for you than struggle with a fit that would better suit someone else.

Make sure to discuss your interests, goals and concerns with career and other advisors and mentors available to you at your law school and from other parts of your life. Return to your self-assessment findings with each new, significant experience, so that you continue to refine your vision of a personally rewarding career. On a more practical level, be sure to keep an eye on the academic calendar as well as that of other bar association and other professional associations of interest, so you can thoughtfully weigh the pros and cons of various opportunities in advance of application deadlines and make informed decisions.

### Motivators

Before you can effectively conduct a job search, it is critical that you first prioritize your personal and work values. In making career decisions that honor your values, you are less likely to feel frustrated or dissatisfied.

As you progress in your career, you will also benefit by taking your values into account when facing career transitions, promotion opportunities, and even retirement.

The following exercise will help you explore your most significant work values. Check the category that best corresponds with the level of importance you place on each value below. Then, go back through the list and identify the top five values that need to be considered when making both career and life decisions.

Value	Level of Importance		
	Very important	Somewhat important	Indifferent, or not important
Achievement			
Advancement			
Adventure/Excitement			
Aesthetics– attractive environment			
Affiliation-belonging to an organization			
Altruism			
Balance			
Change/Variety			
Community			
Competence			
Competition			
Control over schedule			
Creative expression			
Ethics			
Fame			
Family			
Financial security			
Fun/Enjoyment			
Helping people			
High earnings			
Independence/Autonomy			
Influence			
Intellectual challenge			
Interests			
Job security			
Justice/Fairness			
Knowledge			
Leadership			
Leisure-time			
Order			
Power/Authority			
Prestige/Recognition			
Public contact			
Relationships			
Religion/Spirituality			
Sociability			
Stability			
Status			
Supporting leadership			
Teamwork			
Time freedom			
Tranquility			
Travel			
Variety			

## Next Steps:

Step 1: List your top 5 Values	Step 2: Think about an experience or time in your life that demonstrates the significance of this value and give an example	Step 3: Think about the implications for your career and professional development and make any pertinent notes
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

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## INTERESTS

Interests are based on an individual's unique likes and dislikes. Edward Kellog Strong, Jr., a professor at Stanford University, is considered to be one of the founding fathers of career psychology. He is best known for developing the Strong Interest Inventory® and theorized that interests, abilities and achievements all work in tandem to influence professional development. Over the last century, subsequent research confirmed Strong's theories.

In a nutshell, when you make career choices that are in alignment with your interests, you are more likely to feel a greater level of career satisfaction. Reflecting on the culmination of life's experiences can help you to identify likes and dislikes that you can integrate into career decisions, thus ensuring a greater level of job satisfaction.

The best way to explore your interests is to reflect on past experiences. On the following page, think about activities, travels, subject areas, previous or current extra-curricular activities or work.

Experiences, Activities and Hobbies

Liked, and why

Disliked, and why


Subject Areas/Knowledge

Liked, and why

Disliked, and why


Previous Jobs

Liked, and why

Disliked, and why


## Next Steps:

<p>Step 1: Look for patterns and themes in your interests. People usually have several areas of interests. Determine your two or three strongest interest areas and prioritize them.</p>
1.
2.
3.
<p>Step 2: How important are these interests and how can you integrate them into your academic, extra-curricular, and professional choices?</p>
<p>Step 3: What are the implications for you while in law school and in your future career?</p>

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## SKILLS

Many people think about the skills that they have mastered and neglect to consider whether or not they actually enjoy using those skills. In this next exercise, please consider the skills you possess and enjoy using. The following lists are broken down into “data,” “people,” and “ideas.” Please review each and circle those acquired skills that you have enjoyed, or believe you would enjoy using in the workplace. Then, star (\*) any skills you do not yet have but would like to develop.

Data			
Budget	Examine, observe	Manage time	Prioritize
Calculate, compute	Follow instructions	Memorize	Problem solve
Diagnose,	Investigate	Organize, classify	Read to extract facts
Dissect	Look for problems	Plan	Research
Evaluate	Manage money	Prepare financial data	Write reports
People			
Advise, counsel	Advocate	Anticipate needs	Communicate
Consult	Convey warmth/caring	Credit others	Draw people out
Empathize	Help others	Initiate relationships	Inspire
Interview	Lead	Listen	Lobby
Manage	Mediate	Mentor	Negotiate
Network	Organize people	Perform	Persuade
Present	Teach, train	<i>Other:</i>	
Ideas			
Analyze	Brainstorm	Conceptualize	Convey/articulate ideas
Design	Develop ideas	Edit	Explain
Generalize	Implement ideas	Improvise	Issue spot
Read	Research	Strategize	Summarize
Trouble shoot	Write	<i>Other:</i>	

## Next Steps:

### Step 1:

List the top 10 acquired skills that you would most enjoy using

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 2:

List 5 skills that you have not yet mastered, but think that you would like to develop

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 3:

How can you leverage the skills that you have mastered and develop those that you have not?

Leverage	Develop

## PERSONAL TRAITS

The sum of our behaviors, attitudes, and orientation reveal a great deal about our personality. This information is important when making educated career and life decisions that result in gratifying careers. Identifying personal traits can help aid career decision-making and assess “best fit.” Check off the accurate box for each of the descriptors below. Then choose the five that best describe you. Next, identify five qualities that you might not inherently possess, but could offer the best opportunity for further growth and development.

Personal Traits/Characteristics/ Behaviors/Attitudes			
Descriptors	Describes me	Does not describe me	Wish to further develop
Able			
Accurate			
Achiever			
Active			
Adaptable			
Alert			
Ambitious			
Analytical			
Assertive			
Attentive			
Capable			
Calm			
Casual			
Competent			
Competitive			
Confident			
Conscientious			
Concise			

<b>Descriptors</b>	<b>Describes me</b>	<b>Does not describe me</b>	<b>Wish to further develop</b>
Constructive			
Cooperative			
Creative			
Curious			
Decisive			
Dedicated			
Dependable			
Detail-oriented			
Determined			
Diplomatic			
Disciplined			
Dynamic			
Efficient			
Empathetic			
Energetic			
Enthusiastic			
Expressive			
Factual			
Fair-minded			
Flexible			
Focused			
Goal-oriented			
Gregarious			
Imaginative			
Independent			

<b>Descriptors</b>	<b>Describes me</b>	<b>Does not describe me</b>	<b>Wish to further develop</b>
Initiating			
Intellectual			
Introspective			
Logical			
Meticulous			
Motivated			
Optimistic			
Open to new ideas			
Organized			
Original			
People-oriented			
Perceptive			
Personable			
Persuasive			
Positive			
Practical			
Pressure-prompted			
Problem solver			
Productive			
Punctual			
Quick-thinking			
Realistic			
Reflective			

Descriptors	Describes me	Does not describe me	Wish to further develop
Resourceful			
Resilient			
Responsible			
Risk-taker			
Self-disciplined			
Self-starter			
Sensible			
Sincere			
Structured			
Successful			
Systematic			
Task-oriented			
Tactful			
Thoughtful			
Trustworthy			



## WORK ENVIRONMENT

The next exercise looks at various work environment criteria and is intended to help you identify and prioritize elements that would best allow you to thrive.

Please check those elements that are important and write a brief description of why. Additionally, please include other elements that are important to you, if they are not listed.

Ideal organizational Setting	Why this is important
<input type="checkbox"/> Small <input type="checkbox"/> Large	
<input type="checkbox"/> Start-up or young organization <input type="checkbox"/> Established	
<input type="checkbox"/> Formal <input type="checkbox"/> Casual/relaxed	
<input type="checkbox"/> Fast paced environment <input type="checkbox"/> Calm/quiet setting	
<input type="checkbox"/> Competitive <input type="checkbox"/> Friendly	
<input type="checkbox"/> Flexible <input type="checkbox"/> Structured	
<input type="checkbox"/> Traditional single mentor program <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple mentors	
<input type="checkbox"/> Team setting <input type="checkbox"/> Independent contributor	
<input type="checkbox"/> Structured management style <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured management style	
<input type="checkbox"/> Traditional <input type="checkbox"/> Innovative	

Ideal organizational Setting	Why this is important
Describe some of the characteristics of the people with whom you have most enjoyed working.	
Describe the qualities and characteristics that you would like your future supervisor to possess.	
Describe the commitment to diversity and social causes that your ideal organization will possess.	



## PERSONAL PROFILE

Once you have completed the prior exercises addressing your values, interests, skills, personal qualities, and preferred work environment, use your answers to create a Personal Profile. By reviewing and compiling your answers, you are creating a profile that will reveal emerging themes and trends. This profile will then help you identify those factors that will lead to your greatest level of satisfaction in a career transition.

### CORE VALUES:

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### INTEREST THEMES:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

### SKILLS YOU WANT TO APPLY IN YOUR NEXT POSITION:

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### FIVE PERSONAL QUALITIES THAT BEST DESCRIBE YOU:

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### PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES OR "MUST-HAVES":

#### People:

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**Culture:**

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**Place:**

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## REFLECTIONS

Reflecting on your Personal Profile, consider the following:

- What recurrent themes run through your profile?

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- What is your personal definition of “success”?

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- How can you use this information to assess possible internships/ externships, courses and extra-curricular activities?

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- What additional information do you need to gather? Reminder: Ask for help from the CSO!

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- You can develop both short- and long-term career goals based on your profile. What are your short-term career goals?

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- What skills do you seek to cultivate or test-drive in the workplace?

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- What work settings do you hope to experience as you progress through law school?

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- What populations do you hope to serve?

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- What are stressors do you seek to avoid?

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- How can you continue to integrate your career satisfaction factors into your long-term goals/ career planning?

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