



HOW TO SUCCEED IN YOUR SUMMER JOB

Your summer job is an opportunity to try out the legal skills you have developed in law school. In addition to gaining insight into one or more practice areas and settings, a summer job will give you an opportunity to grow your network of professional contacts. It will also provide content for anecdotes about your legal skills for interviews for future externships, 2L summer jobs (On-Campus Interviewing (OCI), in particular), clerkships, and permanent positions. You may use a summer opportunity to obtain a new legal writing sample, a positive reference, or a long-term job offer. Here are some tips to help you succeed this summer – whether you are working for a private firm, government agency, or public interest organization.

✓ **HOW TO STAY ORGANIZED**

Add project deadlines and reminders to your electronic or paper calendar immediately. Keep a running list of all of your assignments, the assigning attorney, and each associated deadline. Review and update it daily.

✓ **HOW TO GET STARTED ON AN ASSIGNMENT**.....

A good rule of thumb is to always make sure you understand an assignment by repeating the scope and instructions to the attorney who gave it to you (“assigning attorney”) and by asking questions to clarify what is expected of you. Write down every instruction and deadline you receive. In fact, if you’re ever asked to meet someone in their office, you should never go in without a pen and paper to write down instructions and deadlines.

Ask: what is the timeframe for each step and for completion? When and how does the assigning attorney want you to provide status updates? What is the format of the final work product? Is it part of a longer brief or project? How will the final product be used?

✓ **HOW TO GET QUALITY ASSIGNMENTS**

Your first written piece should be outstanding since it will establish your reputation and position you for better assignments as the summer progresses. Indeed, everything you write, including emails, memoranda, briefs, and other documents should be your very best work - proofread, citechecked, and error-free. There is no such thing as a “draft.”

Meet all deadlines. If you cannot meet a deadline, tell the assigning attorney as soon as possible and propose a resolution. Ask for help in setting priorities, if necessary. If you are working on a project but will not be able to finish it before the summer ends, ask for guidance to wrap it up or provide detailed instructions when handing it over to another employee.

Acknowledge and learn from mistakes. If you make a mistake, own up to it immediately and suggest ways to remedy it.

✓ **HOW TO GET HIRED PERMANENTLY OR REFERRED FOR OTHER JOBS IN THE FUTURE**

Be proactive. Establish a good relationship and clear lines of communication with your supervisor from the start. Make sure you understand what is expected of you and ask for regular feedback. Your supervisor is likely to be busy and may not provide feedback to you unless asked.

Take responsibility for developing your skills. What do you hope to learn, what experiences would you like to have? Take on a variety of projects and participate in the life of the office by approaching attorneys and asking if you can help them. Whenever possible, accompany attorneys to court, go to meetings, and attend training sessions. Try to have lunch with attorneys at least once per week so you can ask them about their experiences and get advice – don’t socialize only with other interns.

Seek out a mentor. Consult the Career Center’s Guide to Informational Interviews for guidance on how to approach practitioners and questions to ask potential mentors.

If you would like to obtain a writing sample of your work to attach to future job applications or to publish or circulate, ask your employer early in the summer. Never take any drafts or work product out of the office without obtaining the necessary permission.

Keep a record of every project and save your written work. Plan ahead to ask for a recommendation or reference at the end of the summer. When the time comes, have a list of your accomplishments ready to provide to your supervisor.

✓ HOW TO MAKE THE BEST POSSIBLE IMPRESSION

Approach your work like a lawyer. Always remember that even in public interest or government offices, you are working for clients to solve their problems.

Be a team player and keep a positive, “can do” attitude.

Respect client confidences. Never talk about pending matters or cases in public, with friends or family. You may not have taken the bar exam yet, but you are bound by the same ethical obligations. Ask if you are unsure what confidentiality requires.

Maintain the highest standards of professionalism.

- Always be on time. Better yet, show up early. If you are running late, call or email the office and briefly explain why.
- Instill confidence in your professionalism. Demonstrate responsiveness and reliability by promptly returning phone calls and emails and meeting deadlines.
- Dress professionally. If you are unsure of the dress code, ask an attorney, and stick to it even if others do not. When in doubt, err on the conservative side.
- Exercise good judgment. Recognize that the entire summer is part of the interview process. No matter what employers may say, you are being evaluated at all times and building your professional reputation.
- Be respectful and professional with everyone in your office, including support staff and your fellow summer associates or interns. Do not badmouth anyone, curse, or gossip.
- Behave appropriately at social events. You will be judged on your manners and social skills. Limit your alcohol intake, especially during the workday. Follow the lead of other attorneys, not other student interns.
- Receive feedback in the spirit in which it is intended. Don’t argue with the messenger, whine, or complain.

Attend employer-sponsored “extra-curricular” events.

- These aren’t really optional - they are hosted for your benefit to give you a sense of the organization’s culture.
- They also provide an excellent opportunity to find out more about the employer's work and to meet people with whom you might like to work during the summer or in the future.

✓ **WHAT TO DO IF YOU NEED HELP GETTING UN-STUCK**

Ask questions - but think carefully about who to ask and when. You're new and not expected to know everything. That said, think before you ask the assigning attorney a simple research or factual question, especially if he or she is a partner or manager. That person may not have time to answer basic questions, but you could ask if there is someone else in the office you can approach with background questions for future reference. In general, you should ask for help from junior attorneys in the group. Before asking, brainstorm possible solutions with analysis for each outcome, or ideas for generating additional information that might help resolve the issue. Anticipate and prepare for follow-up questions.

If you're having difficulty with research, don't panic. In a working legal office, you are likely to receive legal research assignments that involve unsettled caselaw, few precedents, or fluctuating statutory or regulatory updates. Make sure you're taking full advantage of the resources available to you, including online and phone research assistance. Be mindful of account restrictions or office time limits on the use of Westlaw and Lexis, particularly in small firms, public interest organizations, and government offices. Are there free or lower cost databases that can provide the same information? If you're at a firm, make sure you take advantage of the in-firm librarian for help with difficult research questions.

✓ **HOW TO BUILD YOUR NETWORK BEYOND THE OFFICE**

Take advantage of summer events outside the office to meet practitioners and to learn more about practice areas that interest you.

- Get to know the local legal community and culture. Who are the key players, firms, judges, organizations? Attend local events and training sessions and stay on top of current issues.
- Think about asking to collaborate with a new attorney contact on an article for publication. Your contact will appreciate the help, and you will end up with a polished (and possibly published) writing sample.