



Feature

## The Real World: Life after Law School

By Charisse Dengler

**Gone are the books, the green lawns, and the campus Starbucks. In their places are charcoal suits, high-rise office buildings, and unrealistic expectations. You are no longer a law student. Instead, you are a lawyer, and the first year of your brand-new career can be a long, hard one if you don't know what to expect.**



First of all, if you step into that marble foyer for the first time and realize that you would rather be anywhere but there, you should be. The practice of law is for people who truly want to be lawyers. Those who don't have their hearts in it will have a very difficult road ahead of them. However, if the smell of all those legal pads really gets you going, don't lose track of that passion. It will get you through what just might be the toughest

12 months of your life.

Many fresh-faced new lawyers go into their first year on the job with visions of perfection dancing in their heads. They plan to draft perfect briefs and advance perfect ideas while wearing perfectly ironed shirts and smiling perfectly bright smiles. They are usually disappointed.

When it comes to doing the grunt work that first-years are sure to do, it's usually easier to focus more on getting the job done right rather than getting it done perfectly. There won't be anyone grading your papers, making sure you've done everything properly. There will, however, be a real, live client paying good money for you to make sure that what he/she wants gets done.

In short, you should try to have a broader perspective when it comes to first-year work. Focus on the overall goal of accomplishing a task, and don't get bogged down in the miniscule details.

Once you start working as an attorney, there will be many things you won't have any idea how to do. For example, the firm will have its own system of filing, distributing information, and handling day-to-day operations.

Many times, you won't know where to go, how to get there, or whom to talk to once you do; but instead of spending your

days in the restroom mopping your sweaty brow, ask someone for a practice guide that deals directly with the firm's practice areas. This is a simple, easy way to get your head above the water and gulp in some much-needed air.

Once you have a basic understanding of how things at the firm work, you will gain confidence in your own abilities and become more comfortable doing the work. However, there will most likely come a day when someone hands you an assignment that leaves you baffled, wondering what in the world you spent the last three years of law school learning.

In this situation, take a deep breath, and go with your gut instinct. Do what you think you should do, regardless of whether or not you know that it's the right thing to do. Most likely, your gut feeling will be correct. After all, you must have developed some sort of legal intuition while sitting immobile in those stuffy college auditoriums.

Also, don't be afraid to ask a senior associate or partner for answers to questions or for clarification on assignments. Sometimes, you can save a lot of time simply by asking the right person a question.

Now on to arguably the most exciting part of being an attorney (at least in the eyes of new associates): the perks. The best advice in this area is moderation. Overdoing it or taking advantage of the firm in any way will be viewed negatively. Therefore, even if the firm seems liberal when it comes to living the high life, it's always better to exercise a certain level of restraint.

Another area where restraint should be practiced is in regard to your personal life. Don't get me wrong. Everyone has issues of a personal nature that have to be dealt with from time to time, but keep in mind that your superiors have their own personal problems to deal with.

Unless you have a personal matter that absolutely, positively must be discussed, keep your private life to yourself. Also, it's



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a good idea to talk things over with your family and friends prior to starting work so that they understand exactly what you're getting into. That way, you won't have to deal with the added stress of family disagreements and disappointments if you have to suddenly renege on commitments.

And a last little tidbit of advice for newbie attorneys is to take advantage of your status. Partnership will come soon enough,

and then you won't be able to ask dumb questions or get lost on your way to the restroom. Take this opportunity to learn as much as you can while you have the least amount of responsibility. Being teachable during the first 12 months will pay off in the future.

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