



Feature

Summer Associate Season

By Anayat Durrani

It's that time of year again. Second- and third-year law students are gearing up for summer-associate season with hopes of ultimately securing a permanent position after graduation.



How one navigates the summer can determine his/her level of success in landing a full-time associate position at a good firm.

Steven M. Bernstein is the hiring partner at Fisher & Phillips, LLP. He said above all, students should focus on enjoying the experience.

"That's easier said than done, given the tremendous amount of emphasis that students and some lawyers place on having the 'right' summer experience," said Bernstein. "But the bottom line is that this is a rare opportunity to give a firm's culture, atmosphere, and practice area a 'test drive,' and students should take full advantage."

He said students can do this by taking the time to ask good questions along the way, take mental notes, and absorb as much information as possible.

"Regardless of where you are working and whether or not you are getting paid, summer associates, interns, and volunteers need to treat their positions as if they were the 'end all' jobs of their dreams," said Matthew Pascoello, Esq., Assistant Director for Marketing & Alumni Counseling at the Office of Career Services, American University, Washington College of Law.

Pascoello said this means performing one's best on all assignments, adding that there are no "rough drafts" and that all work should be treated as if it were a "final copy." He said students should be proactive in requesting assignments and always ask for feedback and ways to improve.

"This is your opportunity to prove that the firm made the right decision in choosing you," explained Rose Mary Bordwell, a legal recruiter and CEO of Bordwell & Associates. She has more than 25 years of legal experience, 9 of those years as a law school director of career services.

Bordwell advised that students be respectful and friendly and, most important, never engage in gossip or send notes to friends through the firm's email. "Everyone from the receptionist to the managing partner will have an opinion on how well you fit into the firm, so stay focused and enjoy the ride; it will be a great experience."

The social aspect can be a factor when it comes to summer-associate positions. Michael C. Gross—an associate with Manko, Gold, Katcher & Fox, LLP—said social events are important because they can allow a student to become acquainted with future colleagues on an informal basis outside the office setting.

"Events that include significant others or children can be particularly valuable," said Gross, a 2000 graduate of Temple University School of Law, who was a summer associate with the firm in 1999.

Pascoello said students may not need to attend all functions and should inquire about the summer events calendar early in the summer and plan their itineraries accordingly. "Make a discreet inquiry as to whether attendance is expected at some events; and be sure to dress appropriately, drink responsibly, and enjoy yourself."

Bernstein said that by attending several events, the firm can get to know the student, but also the student can ascertain whether the firm's culture is the right fit for him/her as well.

"As for 'overindulging,' that can certainly happen, although I tend to see less of it these days," said Bernstein. "Of course, this term is not confined to over-imbibing, but may extend to obnoxious displays that distinguish the student in a negative way. While it is important to make a strong impression, it does not necessarily help to 'stick out like a sore thumb' at social events."

Bordwell said students should consider themselves "guests" at a party until they are hired. They need to stay focused, even at social events, because the firm is always "taking a vote." "The real social test is to make people feel comfortable.



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Always be appropriate in language, appearance, and behavior," said Bordwell.

Bernstein said that all firms look for slightly different qualities in a potential lawyer. Social courtesy is important, as is maturity, interactive skills, and "a little self-deprecation." He said most firms probably do not expect summer associates to "party," as these days the summer-camp mentality has fallen by the wayside.

"Most of us look for qualities in a student that we would want to present to the public and, more specifically, our clients," said Bernstein.

On whether firms have cut back on the social spending, Bernstein said that he believes many are becoming slightly more fiscally responsible.

"A number of firms have indicated that they are slowly shifting some of their recruiting focus to lateral hires, which can bring added scrutiny on any summer program from the standpoint of a cost/benefit analysis," said Bernstein.

Bernstein has not sensed that more work is expected from summer associates, but has noticed the trend of splitting summers. "I have never been a big fan of this practice, as it tends to shorten a summer experience that is already far too brief for many. Nonetheless, I certainly understand the logic behind it, and we have been quite tolerant of this practice. Where students do split their summers, I would concede that we tend to feel more pressure to procure a representative sampling of their work product, for purposes of judging their candidacy in the short time they are here."

Regarding how to handle the work that associates get, Gross advises summer associates to approach every assignment carefully and ask questions of the assigning attorney. "Partners and associates both want to see that the summer associate has taken the assignment seriously and has researched the issue properly," explained Gross. "To the

extent you are confused about the scope of an assignment, it is always best to clarify the assignment with the assigning partner before going off on an irrelevant track or spending hours researching the wrong issue."

On occasion, a student may end up working for someone less than satisfactory. How does he/she address that?

"If you find yourself working for an ogre, try not to let it get to you. Do a great job, treat them with respect, and pray that you will soon be reassigned," advised Pascoello.

He also advised seeking the advice of one's mentor or speaking with the Recruiting Coordinator and not to forget to contact one's Career Services office for counseling as well.

Mentors can prove to be valuable resources for summer associates. Gross described mentors as a "sounding board and guide through the summer and the law firm experience" and called them the most important professional relationship a student will have all summer.

"Have your mentor proofread your work. Discuss the fruits of your research with your mentor before going to the assigning attorney. Let your mentor obtain feedback from the assigning attorneys with whom you are working to gauge their satisfaction with your work," said Gross.

Finally, what's the secret to securing long-term employment?

"There are no keys or magic tricks to securing the offer at the end of the summer," said Gross, who authored the advice article "[Summer Associate 101](#)". "The same hard work in law school that landed you the summer position in the first place should carry over into your work at the firm."

Bernstein advises students to just be themselves. "By the time they receive an offer from us, students will have gone through both an on-campus interview, as well as a round of interviews in our office."

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