What qualities should a law student possess in order to make a great attorney?

We asked several attorneys throughout the country their opinions on what qualities a law student should possess in order to become a great attorney. In the following responses, the attorneys describe the qualities and traits they believe are important in becoming a successful attorney. It is our desire that law students can take advantage of the advice offered by the attorneys’ suggestions.

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The 3 C’s to being a great law student and a great attorney are to be competitive, conscientious, and confident. These 3 character attributes, I have personally observed, are most identified with the top ranking law students and the most effective attorneys I have encountered in the courtroom.

-Matthew Reischer, Esq.,
http://legaladvice.com

There are two things I look for when interviewing law students. The first and most important quality is judgment. I have found that they either have it or they don’t, but they can interview in such a way as to demonstrate that they make good decisions and I can trust them with important client matters. The second quality I look for is that they are eager to learn more about the law and the practice of law. This can be a tedious and stressful profession. If they don’t love the law in law school, they are unlikely to love the law when they get into practice.

-Rick Paul
Paul McInnes LLP

Different practice areas will require different skill sets, however, there are some common qualities that every lawyer should have. The number one is attention to detail. An attorney needs to be able to review the work of their staff and their own work to make sure that they have covered all the bases and that there are no errors in the pleadings.

A second quality is the ability to know of what they are good at and what they are not good at and then to accept constructive criticism. I have seen some young attorneys who don’t listen to guidance because they think they know what they are doing. The best young attorneys that I have seen are those that are eager for mentoring.

A third quality that a law student needs to have is a strong work ethic and a willingness to do anything. No matter what field they are going into, they will need to demonstrate that they are willing to do the work necessary for the job. I have had associates that were clock watchers and never came out of their office to assist anyone else. They did not last long with my firm.

Edrie A. Pfeiffer,
Attorney
Hampton Roads Legal Services

Student must be able to pay attention to details as it is the ability to distinguish between competing sides the arguments that best serve your client. Must like to read. Must be able to stand up and defend their
1. The Rules of Court. Read them and when you're done, read them again. Mastering the Rules of Court is a powerful tool. It will make you look like an expert, give you the confidence you need to argue your case and Judges will inherently trust your word over your opposing counsel because of your legal knowledge.

2. Time Management Skills. Many law students are warned about the demanding nature of the legal field; However, they are left in the dark when it comes time to manage their work load in only a matter of hours. Keeping a legal brief, motion and letter bank for future reference will help immensely.

3. A Great Suit. Ever heard, "dress for success?" A great suit will make you feel confident and have you standing up straight when speaking in court. With that suit, don't forget to speak loud and clear, so everyone can hear your argument. Smile. Be polite to your adversary, your client and to all court personnel. Show them you are not just a lawyer, you are one to be trusted.

-Diane Araujo Vidal
Attorney at Law
State of NJ & NY
Iandoli & Edens, LLC

The truth is, when most lawyers come out of law school, they don't know how to be lawyers. They are taught the general principals of how to think like an attorney, but they truly don't know how to be attorneys...yet.

If I could pass on one HUGE piece of advice to law students, it would be this....get experience. Intern in a Judge's chamber, clerk for a law firm get a gig with the prosecutor's office. While a paying job is the ideal, non-paid internships/clerkships will payoff down the road. And if your law school has clinics, jump all over them. They are invaluable. While in law school, I not only got to take a deposition on my "own," but sit at counsel table for a trial. The experience was awesome and set me ahead of my fellow graduates.

-Erik Anderson, Esq.
REARDON ANDERSON, LLC 55

I am an attorney based in California. The top qualities a law student should possess to make a great attorney are: (1) persistence; (2) humility; and (3) confidence. Often these three traits will serve you well to grow a client base, build relationships with colleagues, be successful with clients and against opposing counsel and in front of judges. Be confident, but be humble. Don't think you know everything - it's better to work with people rather than against them. If you work hard, you are confident and you have a persistent approach, you will go far in the field of law.

-Deborah Sweeney

What qualities should a law student possess in order to make a great attorney? Law students should learn to be excellent communicators. Mastery of knowledge of substantive law will come to most law students in time, but the excellent attorney who is in demand is an outstanding communicator. Whether oral or written, conveying complex information to the recipient in a persuasive and understandable manner is critical for the good lawyer. The great lawyer does all this without keeping anyone waiting.

-Matthew D. Saltzman, Esq.,
Shareholder at Kolesar & Leatham
http://www.klnevada.com/
Above all, a new lawyer graduating from law school must have an extremely hard work ethic. It is imperative that today's generation of lawyers recognize that hard work ethic supersedes talent every day in the courtroom. There will be many days in a new lawyer's career that he or she will be working late preparing for evidentiary hearings and trials. Having and maintaining a hard work ethic will allow these new lawyers to excel past their opposition. As the saying goes, “when someone sleeps another is awake.”

In addition, new lawyers set themselves apart if they have substantial experience in some form of business prior to law school. This work experience will allow new lawyers to better understand that being a lawyer does not rest solely on a degree. It has a very much to do with business in and of itself. In fact, many forget that a law firm is business. Likewise, having business experience prior to law school will allow new attorneys to better understand his or her business clients. This type of experience will also further the new lawyer's business generation ability and understand his or her true worth to a firm.

Finally, the ability to briefly set forth your argument and supporting case law in motions filed with the court is a craft that must be practiced and perfected over time. Truly, it is never perfect; however, attempting to perfect that skill will garner great impressions from judges and, hopefully, rulings that favor your clients. Judges respect brief motions with supporting caselaw more than a diatribe of facts truly do not apply to the respective motion. Brief and to the point will get you much further with most judges.

-Michael Pike of Pike & Lustig Turnpike Law
http://www.turnpikelaw.com/

I believe that all great attorneys share the same qualities:
- Responsive and eager for more work
- Client-focused
- Task-oriented
- Passionate
- Relationship-builders
- Goal-oriented

-Jack Clifford is a partner with the leading intellectual property law firm Merchant & Gould.

The best qualities in a lawyer to be aren't ones you learn in school. To be successful in law school and ultimately out in the legal world one has to possess a natural, insatiable curiosity and an unwillingness to settle for anything less than satisfying that curiosity. Law school and the legal business is all about finding answers to often challenging problems and those that are predisposed to searching for answers often find doing so in the legal world an easier transition. The other quality that could really project future success as a law student or lawyer is an unflinching rejection of assumptions and 'short-cuts.' Certain is certain and if you don't know for sure, you have to be a person that is not willing to just guess their way through something.

-Eric Jacobs is the managing partner in the Miami law firm of Beloff Parker Jacobs.

Law students should have the following innate qualities in order to make a great attorney:

-the ability to really listen to someone, and hear what they are not saying;

-the ability to question someone to reveal what they really don't want to talk about;

-confidence in your ability to think like a lawyer and convey your opinion to those who are a lot older and have more experience (like company CEOs);
--integrity (no case or client is worth sacrificing your good name or ethics).

--commitment to working long hours to achieve a favorable outcome for your client.

These are just a few ideas. I have a blog entry on my website bookeditorandproofreader.com of tips for law students and recent law school graduates who are looking for jobs. I was an associate comment editor and graduated Order of the Coif from McGeorge School of Law. I practiced business law for six years before taking off to take care of my children. Instead of returning to a law firm, I started my own business, Tantamount Editorial Services, to do something I truly love, editing and proofreading. I am on the editorial committee for the Res Ipsa Loquitur, the monthly news magazine for the Kern County Bar Association. I usually write an article once a month (the upcoming issue for June will have my article on the importance of being a mentor).

- Lori Wolf

For those students considering careers as litigators and transactional attorneys, I suggest a focus on developing **skills owned by all great attorneys.** On a daily basis, we are required to analyze problems, synthesize solutions and communicate those solutions. Clients present us with problems. Analysis requires listening skills to understand what the client really seeks to accomplish and to ferret out all the component legal and factual issues inherent in the problem. Synthesis is the formulation of a practical, effective and cost efficient solution to a problem. Aside from the obvious necessity to do the appropriate research of substantive law and the rules and procedures we may employ, creativity and an active imagination will often lead to a solution that best meets the client's needs. The best lawyers often find or create paths not seen by others. Whether verbally or in writing, a great lawyer communicates solutions in a concise and persuasive manner to his/her client; opposing parties and lawyers; judges and other decision makers. The ability to recognize an audience and speak to it in a manner that will be best heard and understood is critical. Authenticity, trustworthiness and commitment are recognized and rewarded.

-Michael D. Davidson, Esq., Shareholder at Kolesar & Leatham in Las Vegas, Nev.

A law student should acquire and possess a passion for the law, the desire to help others, the ability to work hard, pay attention and strive to work consistently to comprehend the various areas of the law which are taught in a law school environment. In addition to the ability to grasp the law academically, today's law student should have a strong desire to achieve social justice within our towns, city, state and nation. It is important for a law student to be committed to making a positive difference in the actual lives of their clients and to work toward social justice on a wide range of areas.

In short, a good law student should aim to make a positive difference in the world!

-Dr. Adam Alvarez Lawyer and Criminal Justice Professor at Florida Technical College

Relationship building skills. It's no different than any other profession. You have to learn how to make contacts and be an important go-to person.

-Shane Fischer, Attorney at Law
www.fischer-law.com
www.callshane.com

I believe a law student should be passionate, detail-oriented and humble.

Passion is the fuel for work and helps one push through the tough days, setbacks and unfavorable outcomes that inevitably occur from time to time.

Because attorneys do have to sweat the small stuff such as grammar, style and wording, being detail-
oriented is necessary to success. Whether it’s ensuring briefs and citations are crisp and correct, or using language to target an array of audiences, the tiniest detail can have the greatest impact.

In a world of complicated legal concepts and provisions, one must stay humble. Even the brightest attorney can miss something. This character trait is especially important when absorbing instruction from fellow attorneys, supervisors and mentors.

-Andrae P. Crismon is the managing attorney of the Murfreesboro office of Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands.

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Here are some of the many qualities that a law student should possess in order to become a great attorney. First, they should have a passion for the law. This includes exploring and familiarizing with as many different areas of law as possible. This is important because eventually one will choose an area of law in which they will practice in and finding the right area of law can be essential for success. Secondly, they should possess ethics and integrity. It is never too early to build one’s reputation as being ethical and as a person with high integrity. The legal community is small and tight knit and if one builds a poor reputation as being unethical, it can substantially damage one’s legal career. Lastly, have the desire to learn and continually improve. One of the greatest things about being an attorney and practicing law is that the law continually changes and provides opportunities to learn new things. Every attorney can improve and grow at their respective jobs. Having a desire to continually better oneself will go a long way in making you a great attorney, regardless of what area of law you may eventually practice in.

-John Dosdall is a criminal defense attorney at JacksonWhite.