5 Tips for First Year Law Firm Associates

**Summary:** Here are 5 tips and pointers that we have used (or wish that we had used) when we were first-year associates.

Welcome to your first year as an associate. In the coming months and years you are going to learn tremendous amounts about the practice of law, just as you learned tremendous amounts during your first year of law school. But you won’t just be learning; you will be representing real-life clients in cases and transactions. In today’s booming economy, there is an ever-increasing amount of work to be done and you are going to have a busy year filled with new experiences.

We don’t mean to scare you, but from now on you will be adjusting your life to fit around your schedule at the office, which can be a difficult transition. Do not despair; you will be able to see people and to socialize. It is possible to still have a life; it will just take some work (Pardon the pun). There have even been rumors of associates having and maintaining romantic relationships. We were once first-year associates and we ran into many of the stresses and obstacles you will meet along the way. Hopefully, we can offer some helpful advice.

1. **KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT AS A FIRST YEAR LAW FIRM ASSOCIATE**

You know that you are going to be working hard and putting in long hours as you learn to practice law at a high level. You know that the free time of your third year of law school is a thing of the past. You are starting a new professional experience and, at least at the start, you won’t be able to control your schedule. Let those important to you know this and that you need some leeway while you acclimate yourself to your new environment.

When you start practicing law, it can be difficult to know when you will be busy and when you will have some free time. You will be getting important assignments that require extended and immediate attention. After all, if it was going to be easy, they wouldn’t need you or your firm. You may have to cancel plans or disappoint people because of the demands of your job. Trust us, as time goes by, you will better understand how your job works and will learn how to better keep your life in balance.

See the following article for more information:

- **Survival Tips for First Year Associates**

2. **WORK HARD (AND KNOW YOU NEED TO WORK HARD) BUT HAVE FUN**

Every first-year’s nightmare is that special once-in-a-lifetime occasion that comes right in the middle of a crunch time at work. Don’t panic. If it is important to you, and you can re-shuffle your schedule, by all means do so. Most often, no one cares when you do the work, only that it gets done right and on time.
Organize and plan to be available for what is important outside of work. Let your co-workers know that you are planning something special and that it means a lot to you. Your colleagues will help you out - after all, you are all on the same team. But remember, if the research is due on Tuesday, and you have plans on Monday night, your best bet is to have it finished before you leave.

Here is a professional secret. Your firm is going to be investing many thousands of dollars in training in you and is looking at every possible way to retain you. They know that if they let work interfere too much with what matters most to you, they are going to lose you and their investment. No one gains by keeping you away from important personal events, and you will be surprised how much accommodation you will get if your requests are reasonable and you do all you can to help the team.

Okay, we know that planning spontaneous behavior is an oxymoron, but it may save your sanity. Try and stay in the loop of what people are planning and what is going on. Learn to be spontaneous, and when you have free time you did not expect, try to take full advantage of it.

If you thought you would be at the printer all night but are done at 6 p.m., do not just go home and watch television. Take a loved one to dinner on the spur of the moment. There are too many times when you become unexpectedly too busy to squander the free time you never thought you would have.

See the following articles for more information:

- Concentrating on the Needs of Your Employer
- One of the Most Significant Lessons I Personally Ever Learned About Work
- How to Survive in Your Job and Succeed in a New Job
- Why You Should Work Weekends and Holidays
- Try as Hard as You Can

3. USE EVERY ADVANTAGE TO DO GOOD WORK

Everyone you work with is under the same demands as you. They appear to have better balance in their lives because they have had more time to learn how to use every advantage to balance their lives.

There are hundreds of tips, tricks and ideas, and not all of them will work for you. Can you work at home with a laptop? Can you work on the train? Would you have more free time if you came into work earlier?

Assess your options early and often. Seek out every advantage you can to do your work thoroughly and efficiently. Efficiency is the key. You have too many demands on your time not to be as efficient as possible. Quite literally, the time you save is often your own.

See the following article for more information:

- Alpha Pygmy Goats, Unreasonably Optimistic Russian Attorneys and Setting Unreasonably High Expectations of Yourself

4. SOCIALIZE AT WORK

Every firm has planned events during the course of the year, and you should try to attend at least some of them. It will give you a chance to get to know the people at your firm in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Most of the attorneys in your firm have made the adjustment from law student to busy associate, and many can give you wonderful advice as to how they have managed to do so successfully. Talk to the other junior associates about how they manage to balance their lives and their work schedules, and listen to stories that more senior associates tell about their experiences as first-year associates. However, remember that senior associates always truly believe that they had it much worse than you. Do not believe them.

Do not overlook the firm as a resource for meeting people and socializing. Work is a wonderful place to meet people that you now have a lot in common with. Remember, you will be spending a lot of time at the firm, and it is a good way to make that experience a more enjoyable one. You won’t believe us, but we have met some very important people in our lives through our firm.

See the following articles for more information:

- The Importance of Being Well-liked in Your Job
- Create Rules that Make You Feel Successful and Not Unsuccessful
5. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Finding time for your life also means trying to find time for yourself. You may have time for a social event but just not have the energy for it. Sometimes, spending a day alone in your apartment or going for a long walk is just what the doctor ordered. Try to keep the stress at a manageable level, and remember to take time for yourself.

See the following articles for more information:

- In Search of Work Life Balance
- Finding Work Life Balance
- Work Life Balance and a Big Law Job
- Is Work Life Balance a Realistic Goal at Big Law Firms?
- The Importance of Disconnecting From Your Work
- The Most Important Person You Communicate With is Yourself

Conclusions

We did not write this article to scare you or to make you reconsider your career choice. We are just trying to give you tips and pointers that we have used (or wish that we had used) when we were first-year associates.

The most important thing is to try to find the right balance for your life and to keep your expectations real. The transition from student to professional is a difficult one, and hopefully our advice will make it a little easier. Trust us, in a few short months, you will be an old pro.

Please see the following articles for more information about life as an associate:

- What’s Next after Finishing Law School
- The Real World: Life after Law School
- The Five Stages of Every Legal Career
- The Choices of Practice in Law
- Choosing a Law Specialty: Who Are You and What Do You Want
- The 10-Step, "No-Fail" Guide to Distinguishing Yourself as a First-Year Associate
- The Art of Drafting a Proper Legal Memo
- Top 39 Tips for New Litigation Associates and Trial Lawyers: How to Be a Good Litigation Attorney
- The Real Reason There Are Fewer Law Firm Jobs (What No Attorney Wants You to Know)
- Avoid the Dangers of Getting Jobs Through Friends and Family
- The Three Major Legal Fraternities
- 2015 LawCrossing Salary Survey of Lawyer Salaries in Best Law Firms
- The Pros and Cons of Working in a Law Firm
- The Impact Law Firm Economics Can Have on Your Legal Career
- How to Avoid a Bad Reputation at Work
- Must You be a "Type-A" Personality to Succeed in a Law Firm?

Please see the following articles for more information about law firm jobs:

- What Law Firms Look for In a Lateral Resume
- Law Firms and Part-Time Attorneys—They Really Can Go Hand in Hand
- Overhead Ratios of a Law Firm
- 2014 AmLaw 200 Law Firm Revenue, Firm Size, and Breakdown
- Top Ten Reasons Why Older Attorneys Have a More Difficult Time Getting Law Firm Jobs
- Staying Put In Your Current Legal Firm and Learning Is the Best Option In Recession.

Please see the following articles for more information about law school, the bar exam and succeeding in your first year of practice:

- Acing Law School Exams: Grade-A Advice
- What’s Next after Finishing Law School
First Year of Law School Survival Tips
Does Law School Rank Determine Success?
The Three Major Legal Fraternities and Why You May Want to Join One
Late Bloomers: Going to Law School Later in Life
Coping with Law School Dismissal
Graduated From a Tier 3 Law School: There’s much you can do with your degree
The Real World: Life after Law School
Why You Should Think Twice About Remaining in Law (or Going to Law School)
After Law School, B-School: The Rise of M.B.A.’s Among Attorneys
Law Schools at Historically Black Colleges and Universities
Non-ABA-Accredited Schools May Offer Good Alternative
Top Law Schools Analyzed and Ranked By America’s Top Legal Recruiter Harrison Barnes
The Five Stages of Every Legal Career
"Guidelines on Reciprocity or "Admission on Motion" among the States as per American Bar Association"
Pass the Bar in One State, Work in Another
Taking the Bar in Multiple States
10 Ways to Bounce Back After Failing the Bar and Pass on Your Next Attempt
Don’t Panic! Ten Tips for Surviving the Bar Exam
New York’s Exam: The Biggest Baddest Bar
If You Have Failed the Bar Exam It Is Not the End of the World
Barriers Fall for Out-of-State Attorneys
The 10-Step, "No-Fail" Guide to Distinguishing Yourself as a First-Year Associate
The Art of Drafting a Proper Legal Memo
Top 39 Tips for New Litigation Associates and Trial Lawyers: How to Be a Good Litigation Attorney
2015 1st Year Salaries and Bonuses of the Top Law Firms