



Relevant results.

lawjobs.com Career Center

[lawjobs Home](#) [Find Jobs](#) [Post Resume](#) [Job Alerts](#) [Career Center](#) [Help](#)

[Career Center Home](#) > [Career Advancement](#)

10 Survival Tips for New Associates

David Dummer
Texas Lawyer
December 11, 2007

You studied hard in law school, successfully navigated a summer program or externship and passed the bar exam. But how do new associates survive as lawyers in the "real world"?

1. Don't be afraid to be a new associate. While being prepared is incredibly important, it is OK not to know everything -- no one does. Supervising attorneys know that new associates need training. A first-year associate who is uncertain about an assignment should ask questions and seek clarification. Specific, thoughtful inquiries demonstrate attention to the matter at hand and a recognition of one's limits as a brand-new practitioner.

2. Managing supervisors' expectations is half the battle. An important aspect of new associates' jobs is understanding the scope of assignments and meeting deadlines. But projects can take on lives of their own. One lawyer may ask for a deposition outline in one case, while another asks for a response to a temporary restraining order in another. Don't rush to complete both projects when the allotted time makes competently doing so impossible. Keep supervising attorneys aware of time-management obstacles and other issues as they come up, so they can adjust staffing, deadlines and expectations. That kind of open dialogue leads them to perceive the new associate as responsible and prepared rather than sloppy and delinquent.

3. Learn to work with assistants, paralegals and support staff. New lawyers often are used to doing everything themselves, and they fail to utilize the many resources available at their firms. Every person at a firm plays an important role, and developing a strong working relationship with others in the office is critical to a successful career. Partners want to work with associates who complete projects efficiently. Someone who performs administrative tasks rather than utilizing an assistant will spend more time on projects than his or her peers -- resulting in a competitive disadvantage.

Clients will not pay for the time it takes an associate to type, organize files and manage his or her calendar, and an assistant does a better job of those things. In fact, in the beginning, the assistants and paralegals probably know more about the practice of law than the associate does. They are also familiar with the resources and experts within the firm that can make the associate's life easier. For example, they will know when the last mail leaves for the day, how to format a pleading, whether a particular partner hates staples and who can fix computers. [Taking advantage of their expertise and services](#) will make you a better lawyer.

4. The seeds planted today can make it rain tomorrow. Being a lawyer involves more than billing hours. As with anything, being well-rounded and connected to the community is important. In fact, many clients now demand it. Make pro bono service and community involvement a habit early on, and it will pay dividends later. As marketing legal services is a long-term process, you will never regret starting early.



Image: Jason Reed / Photodisc

ARTICLE TOOLS

- [Printer-friendly Version](#)
- [Email this Article](#)
- [Comment on this Article](#)
- [Reprints & Permissions](#)

**The 2007 Law Firm
Business Development
Practices Survey**

**is now
open!**

5. Stay in touch with friends. Your mother may not be the CEO of a billion-dollar conglomerate, but you can still have a client-development strategy. One way to develop business is to stay in touch with friends from work, college and law school. In a few years, [many of them will be potential clients](#). There are simple ways to do this. Many law school alumni associations have city-specific groups that host functions once or twice a year. These events help maintain relationships with friends and acquaintances with a minimal investment of time. While it is important to focus on work, do not neglect a social life. Take friends to dinner, go to ball games or just hang out. Having fun with friends can be one of the best client-development decisions ever made.

6. Tap others' knowledge. As a lawyer, you have the privilege of working with bright people every day. In the beginning, it is not necessary to constantly reinvent the wheel. While the work will require critical thought and exacting research, do not be afraid to ask for forms and samples to reference while tackling assignments. When drafting a motion for summary judgment, consider asking an attorney who is slightly senior if he or she can recommend an example document. Reviewing high-quality work product will help you understand the end goal and give you a feel for the appropriate voice. Understanding expectations is a big part of meeting them. Of course, do not rely solely on the sample, as this can result in stale or inaccurate work product. Be creative and be certain to check that the law or rules have not changed.

7. Learn the case. When assigned projects, learn the facts and motives that drive the case. This is an easy way to dramatically increase the quality of the work product. It also makes you an invaluable team member. Although you may not realize it at first, junior associates often have the best command of the facts. For example, you may be the only person who has read all of the key e-mails and reviewed every document in the case. You may also be the person who learns the most about the client's business. Combining this encyclopedic knowledge of the facts with an understanding of the case strategy makes an associate valuable. For this reason, when it is time to attend hearings, prepare witnesses or draft critical motions, your knowledge will make you a natural go-to person (and a likely recipient of increased responsibility).

8. Be prepared and be early. When invited to attend meetings, even if they are just with other attorneys in the office, be a few minutes early and be prepared. For example, if you and a partner are calling the client to discuss a contract and a procedural rule, bring the client's phone number, an extra copy of the contract and the rule book to the meeting. If you are assisting a partner during a hearing, bring copies of the cases cited in your brief and a copy of the relevant rules. This tip seems simple, but you will be surprised to see how few people follow it. You will never be chastised for being ready, and others will notice that you are on top of your game.

9. Know the rules. You may think that the partners know all of the rules and all of the cases. They do not (and neither do you). Always check the relevant statutes and rules. The few minutes you take to carefully read the rules (including the local rules) will save you major headaches down the road. It is much better to discover that the court requires briefs to be triple-spaced and in 14-point font before you file the brief than after. Likewise, knowing that intermediate Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays are excluded in computing time may prevent an "all-nighter" before a major deadline.

10. Your nameplate is your shingle. Remembering this mantra will help you learn how to operate in the firm setting. In many ways, you are a solo practitioner, and the partners and senior associates in the office are your clients. Think about what makes these clients want to hire you -- consistently good work, value-added creativity and efficiency. Run your office so that you can deliver this type of work product to your clients every day.

David Dummer is a litigation/regulatory associate with Weil, Gotshal & Manges in Dallas, focusing primarily on complex commercial litigation.

