



MEMORANDUM

To: 1Ls & 2Ls
From: Office of Career Services
Date: May 2019
Re: Tips for Succeeding as a Summer Associate

The following memo highlights things to keep in mind while at your summer job. Taking 5 minutes to read the memo will ensure the information is on the top of your mind so you can maximize your summer. We are here all summer long and speak with you by phone, by skype, or in person. **If you have any questions please contact us at 617-495-3119 or at ocs@law.harvard.edu**

I. Summer Purpose

Participation in a law firm summer associate program is a unique opportunity to get an insider's view of law firm practice and culture. Your summer job will be an 8 to 10-week job interview during which you and the firm will assess each other. Your goals for the summer are to: (1) secure an offer; and (2) gain information and experience that will help you define your career objectives. Here are some suggestions and observations to keep in mind as you begin your summer job.

- Be sensitive to economic realities. Law firms are under constant pressure to adapt to an ever-changing economy. Demonstrate to the firm that you "get it." Maintain a positive, friendly and appreciative attitude with your peers and the attorneys and staff at the firm throughout the summer.
- Take advantage of professional development opportunities. The professional development staff and individual departments organize multiple information and training sessions over the summer. Take advantage of these opportunities to learn about new practice areas and about the firm in general.
- Find a mentor. A mentor will not only help you navigate through your summer experience but also may serve as an advocate when it comes time for the firm to make decisions on offers. Identify and reach out to attorneys with similar characteristics (e.g. HLS alumni, undergraduate alumni, same prior employers, similar pro bono interests, and similar hobbies.)
- Build relationships across the firm. Try to work with as many partners and senior associates as possible so that you can learn more about the firm and its practice areas and more people can get to know you.
- Be mindful of absences. Your summer position is relatively brief and you should try to keep your number of absences to zero. However, there may be instances where an absence is necessary (e.g., a federal judicial clerkship interview or attending a wedding). To avoid any surprises, speak with your primary summer program contact about any planned absences at the very start of the summer. Avoid being presumptuous or unreasonable when making such a request.



II. First Impressions Count

Employers want to hire individuals who are enthusiastic to be there. Here are some suggestions for ways to make and maintain a good impression.

- Be on time. Check with the summer coordinator as to what time to arrive on the first day. After that, look around and see when your summer peers tend to arrive and leave the office. While you do not need to be the last one out the door, you should not always be the first one out the door either.
- Dress the part. Some firms are “casual dress” or “business casual dress” all summer. Find out what this really means and make sure your clothes conform. (Note that law firm casual does not equal law school casual.) You can always find out by calling the recruitment coordinator. Whatever the policy, most summer associates will wear suits on the first day of work.
- Your attitude matters. Maintain a friendly and enthusiastic attitude throughout the summer. Let everyone you meet at the firm know that you are happy and excited to be there. This means no complaints about your office, secretary, peers, assignments, practice areas, etc.
- Know your role. If you are invited to attend a client meeting or court appearance, sit quietly and observe (unless someone specifically asks for your input.) Prior to the meeting, ask the supervising attorney if they would like you to take notes or help in any other way, such creating an agenda, or coordinating materials. If you take notes, be thorough, type them up, and send them to the supervising attorney promptly.
- Respect the support staff. Secretaries, paralegals, and other office support personnel are integral to the firm and can offer you a wealth of information. Also, their opinions of you may factor into hiring decisions.

III. Communicate with Care

Both verbal and nonverbal communication skills are a cornerstone of your success and play equal roles in formulating your professional persona.

- Utilize a professional tone. You should never start an email with an informal greeting such as “Hey.” Instead, opt for a more traditional greeting, such as “Dear Robert,” “Dear Ms. Windsor,” or simply “Margaret.” Be cognizant of your colleagues’ styles and adapt to them.
- Be concise. Whether written or verbal, all communications should be organized and thoughtful. Emails should be as brief as possible, and highlight the subject/importance toward the top of the message.

IV. Deliver Superior Work Product

The quality of your work matters. Listen carefully when you are given an assignment and make sure you understand what is being asked of you. This point cannot be overstated. Employers tell us that poor listening skills are often the downfall of junior associates. Do not shy away from asking clarifying questions. Get in the habit of reiterating the assignment at the end of the meeting.



- Communication is key. If the assignment is taking you considerably longer than anticipated, let the assigning attorney know. What initially seemed like a straightforward assignment may require further clarification as you proceed. Keep a running list of questions that you have and, if possible, address them at once instead of going back with frequent, individual questions.
- Never complain about an assignment. Never whine or complain about an assignment to anyone (even fellow summer associates), even if you think it is boring or menial. Some assignments will be more interesting than others. That is the reality of law firm practice.
- A “draft” is not a draft. Even if your supervisor requests a draft, he or she really wants a polished, final work product. Check your citations and proofread carefully for typos. Do not rely on spell-check.
- Give equal effort to partners and associates alike. Assume that everyone’s opinion of you counts. You will be evaluated on your work product and demeanor for all of your assignments, large and small. Consider each assignment as an opportunity to make an impression and establish a relationship.
- Take ownership. You should become as expert as possible regarding your assignment. Don’t assume someone else will double check it. Understand how your piece fits into the bigger picture by asking questions and taking it upon yourself to do further research. Ask follow up questions and implement critical feedback. Give the impression that you care.
- Seek out feedback. It is critical that you know how you are doing throughout the summer and in the early years of your time at an organization. A good way to obtain feedback is to ask, “How could I have improved my work product on the assignment?” Some attorneys will be open to feedback and others not as much. As you develop relationships with supervising attorneys, feedback will become more natural and part of your professional relationship.
- Address problems head on. If you receive negative feedback on a project, do not react defensively. Make sure that you understand what the evaluator is telling you and that your work on future projects reflects improvement. If you are confused about the feedback you are getting or are unsure of how to turn things around, speak promptly with either a mentor or a trusted colleague and call OCS so we can help you navigate the situation.

V. Manage Your Time Effectively

“Get it to me whenever you can.” Do not be fooled when you hear this type of comment from assigning attorneys. Firms care about your ability to meet (and beat) deadlines and your willingness to work hard.

- Respect deadlines. If you are uncertain about a deadline, ask for clarification. If the assigning attorney won’t budge from “whenever you can get it to me,” ask another attorney who is familiar with their work style. If you are able, hand in assignments before the deadline. Do not, however, sacrifice quality for speed. Missing a deadline could seriously damage your reputation and cost you a job. If you feel that you are in danger of missing a deadline and are overwhelmed with work, seek help immediately.



- Record your time. Always be sure to clarify how you should bill time on an assignment. Time sheets are crucial to the firm's ability to submit bills to clients. Firms monitor compliance with time sheet deadlines. Some firms even circulate lists of attorneys who have not met these deadlines. You do not want to see your name on these lists.
- Maintain a constant stream of work. You should never be sitting around with nothing to do. If you are not getting enough work, speak with your mentor or the firm's assignment coordinator.

VI. Use Technology Wisely

Firms are technologically savvy environments and they expect you to make use of web-based resources. However, inappropriate use of such resources can reflect poorly on you and damage your professional reputation.

- Firm technology is not for personal use. You should not have any expectation of privacy when using firm resources, and using firm equipment for personal use can lead to embarrassing situations and can potentially cost you a job. Never use a client number for anything personal. Remember that the firm can track your computer usage and can find out what websites you visit and for how long. Resist the urge to procrastinate by playing online games, shopping, surfing, emailing, or posting.
- Manage social media. Assume that the firm and other future employers can view anything you post. Make sure that your social media privacy settings limit access to your page. Both summer associates and regular associates have lost offers or their job due to personal social media posts and comments.
- Be efficient with Lexis and Westlaw. Although free at law school, Lexis and Westlaw are very expensive services that the firm bills to the client. Find out what the firm's billing practices are; sometimes, there is a preferred provider. When in doubt, check with the assigning attorney about appropriate use.

VII. Manage the Social Experience

In addition to your work product, the firm is evaluating your interpersonal skills and your judgment. While some of the advice below may sound obvious, every year several students do not receive offers due to inappropriate actions.

- Be on your best behavior at all times. Any hint of improper personal conduct could lead to serious consequences.
- Attend events. Go to as many social outings as you can, though not at the expense of your work projects. If you are unsure about how to manage a conflict between a work and firm social event, ask the recruiting department or an OCS advisor.
- Limit alcohol consumption. Watch your alcohol intake and limit yourself to one or two drinks at an event. This is absolutely not the time to take advantage of an open bar.



- Dress for the event. If you are not sure of the proper attire for a specific outing, ask attorneys or the coordinator.
- RSVP promptly. Don't put the organizers in the position of needing to follow up with you. If you agree to attend an event and an unavoidable conflict arises, let the recruiting coordinator and any other relevant people know as soon as possible.
- Watch what you say. Do not swear, make sexual innuendos, or tell off-color jokes, even if the associate or partner with whom you are talking does so.
- Handling difficult situations. If anyone at the firm behaves in an inappropriate manner, talk to an OCS advisor or a trusted mentor at the firm so we can address the situation immediately.

VIII. Navigate the Offer

One of the goals of the summer program is to secure a post-graduation offer or, for 1Ls, an offer to return at the end of your second summer for a "touch back."

- Timing of the offer. Some firms will give an offer on the last day of the program, and others will wait until all evaluations are in, after the program ends. There could be a period of several weeks where you do not know if you have an offer. If you receive an offer at the end of the summer, do not feel pressure to accept or reject on the spot. Rather, thank the firm enthusiastically and tell them that you will get back to them as soon as possible.
- The Exit Interview. The completion of the summer program often includes an exit interview where you have a chance to again thank the firm and express enthusiasm. The exit interview is NOT the place to express any doubts about the firm or to address any grievances you had during the summer.

IX. Enjoy the Experience

This summer is a unique opportunity to see if the firm is a good match for you and to learn about various practice areas. Take advantage of all the summer has to offer and enjoy your time. By acting in a professional manner, navigating the assignment system and social scene, and producing high quality work with enthusiasm, you will receive an offer.