## "A jack of all trades"

## From criminal to commercial, lawyer to receptionist

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HIS CARD MAY BE KEPT UNTIL NEEDED OR SOLD – GET OUT OF JAIL FREE... Well, maybe not. Early on, law lecturers repeatedly reminded us that the law was not what the media would have us believe. As lawyers we wouldn't be jumping out of our seats screaming "I object" – and the work, we were told, is generally neither glamorous nor exciting. I was told that the only magical cards a client can use to have us try to get them out of jail will usually read "VISA" or "Mastercard" rather than "Community Chest".

Well, I've found that the work is not as dull as I was led to believe. In fact, aside from the discovery process, otherwise known as the bane of my existence, my work has always been at the least interesting and more often than not exciting.

The College of Law was originally an option for becoming qualified through New South Wales only, although it expanded in 2005 and now provides for direct admission in Victoria. Essentially, the course is a cross between traditional articles and courses such as Leo Cussens or Monash PLT. The College of Law course requires the equivalent of 15 weeks' full-time work experience and 15 weeks of study.

Part-time students are able to undertake work experience while studying at the College of Law, but as I was enrolled in a full-time course, I had the choice between completing work experience before or on completion of the course.

The College of Law classes included both people with prior work experience and people without. Regardless of our experience levels, however, we compared notes, drew lessons from one another and ultimately learnt a lot. I know I have profited from more experience in drafting, practice appearances and mock negotiations.

Starting legal work was a shock to the system, mostly because it was so different from studying the law. Property now meant attending settlements, and not debating hypothetical adverse possessions. Criminal law now meant bail applications and committal mentions. When about half of my criminal law subject at university focused on murder, the reality is that I've worked on only two murders in the past year. Now, in running a case from beginning to end, filling out forms, dealing with courts and observing all the procedures – it finally all makes sense! Legal knowledge has became relevant – in reality, not just in abstractions.

## "If the phones were busy, I'd answer. If I arrived first in the morning, I'd open mail."

I learnt a lot in my work experience. I threw myself into everything and learnt as I went along. One day, on my way to a bail application, my supervisor explained to me the process, the necessary points to cover in a submission and the applicable legislation (not bad in a 10 minute walk). I then saw the theory put into practice less than half an hour after hearing it.

I was given a variety of work, from criminal to commercial, from lawyer to receptionist. I helped out at different stages of files; instituting proceedings, sending bills, instructing at court, briefing counsel, drafting pleadings, meeting with clients, even discovery, though I offered not to do the last. If the phones were busy, I'd answer. If I arrived first in the morning, I'd open mail. Once a month I'd sit with the boss and help out wherever needed with the trust accounting – sometimes reading out cheque numbers, sometimes looking for a missing six cents.

I have now been working at Chiodo Madafferi



