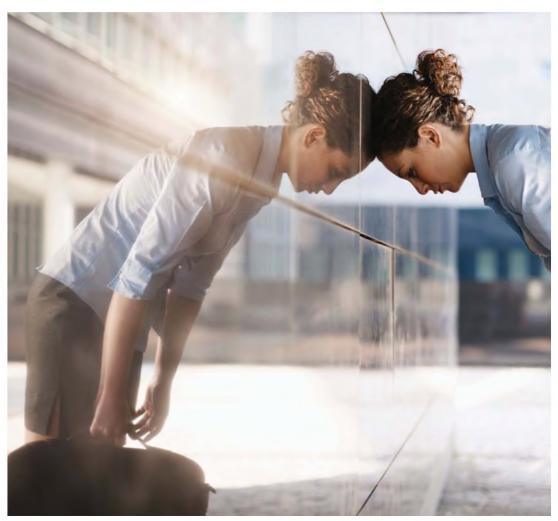
Learning to cope with

A LITTLE
KNOWLEDGE
CAN GO A
LONG WAY
IN MAKING
THE LIFE OF
A TRAINEE
LAWYER A
LOT EASIER.



TOCKPHO

Starting out as a trainee lawyer is a challenge. Remembering the location of the stationery cupboard is hard enough, let alone knowing which of your tasks to prioritise, or the meaning of r 35.05 of the Civil Procedure Rules.

To help you understand the expectations that firms have of you in the first couple of years, the YLJ interviewed partners and principal solicitors at Arnold Bloch Leibler, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Freehills, Gadens Lawyers, Lander & Rogers, Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Slater & Gordon and the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office about their expectations of trainee lawyers.

What sort of work/life balance do you expect trainees to adopt?

- We want people with a balanced life and expect trainees to have wide interests.
- Extracurricular interests should be encouraged. They are good for wellbeing, broadening horizons, lateral thinking and creating networks.
- Trainees should adopt a work/life balance that is similar to their colleagues'.
- Demonstrate a commitment to meeting client needs but enjoy a life outside work.
- We want trainees to be healthy and focused, not burnt out.
- Sometimes you will miss extracurricular activities to get the job done.

How can a trainee lawyer impress their supervisor and gain their trust?

- A great attitude: show enthusiasm and interest and be accessible.
- Provide high-quality pieces of work efficiently.
- Make life easier for your supervisor.
- Inform your supervisor about developments and manage deadlines.
- Listen, ask questions and follow instructions.
- Get involved in the broader firm and its activities.
- Show you are a team player and offer assistance to colleagues.
- · Be professional, punctual and responsive.

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great expectations

- Respect other employees and build working relationships around the firm.
- Make suggestions beyond your specific instructions.
- Engage in discussion with colleagues, don't be passive.

How do you expect trainees to prioritise work and practical legal training?

- Practical legal training and learning must take priority over billable work.
- Trainees tend to prioritise work but getting admitted is the main goal.
- Communication is key. Give colleagues adequate warning about your availability.
- Discuss workload issues with your supervisor or buddy.
- Just say no if you do not have capacity to complete a task.

What is your reaction to the idea that a trainee should be first in the office and last to leave?

- Rubbish! Nonsense! Abhorrent!
- A trainee's hours should reflect their workload.
- Sometimes long hours are required but if you have finished your work, leave.
- Enthusiasm can be expressed in other (better) ways.
- Working efficiently and managing your workload effectively is more impressive – work smarter, not longer.
- This behaviour (without cause) is transparent and unlikely to impress.
- This may indicate poor time management or slacking off in the day.

What mistakes are acceptable and unacceptable from a trainee lawyer?

- Most mistakes are acceptable.
- Errors of drafting, procedure, strategy and sometimes the law are acceptable.
- Trainees will make errors, as they are still developing skills and experience.
- Trainees should learn from their mistakes.
- We want trainees to feel they can "fess up" to errors.
- Simple mistakes cast doubt over whether a trainee can get the substance right.

- Take advantage of resources available to reduce errors and ask questions.
- · Mistakes deemed unacceptable include:
 - errors due to lack of proofreading (typos, grammar);
 - repetition of the same mistake/s;
 - · basic errors of law; and
 - mistakes due to unethical or dishonest practices.

What can a trainee lawyer do to progress their career?

- Take ownership of matters.
- Show an interest in the broader context of a matter beyond your discrete task.
- Go the extra mile to cultivate each client relationship.
- Develop a reputation for having a good work ethic.
- Volunteer for a variety of tasks, including the less glamorous.
- Establish networks within the firm: fellow trainees, junior lawyers, support staff. Contribute to the office culture.
- · Learn as much as possible.
- Don't rush: initially, just fit into your team and perform your role very well.

What are career-limiting moves for trainee lawyers?

- Errors of judgment which indicate poor ethics or dishonesty.
- Failing to be upfront about errors: 'fess up early.
- · Inappropriate behaviour at firm functions.
- · Not being true to themselves.
- Most problems relate to attitude not competence.

Can trainees do anything without instructions in order to show initiative?

- Suggest the next steps and do not wait to be told what to do.
- Trainees can't provide advice but can project manage aspects of matters.
- Assist clients without providing advice (such as returning phone messages for the partner).
- Do that bit extra draft a letter your supervisor has not yet done.

- Initially, all pieces of work will be checked by a colleague.
- Depends on the partner, group and working relationship. You will get a feel for it
- If you think a task should be done, do it. I just won't bill your time if it wasn't needed

Can trainee lawyers be too enthusiastic or try too hard?

- Trainees should be themselves and act naturally.
- We encourage participation and enthusiasm you can't have too much.
- Trainees should try not to over-promise and under-deliver. Be realistic about your capacity and speak up if you need help.
- We prefer trainees to just get on with the job.
- Honesty and integrity are important as a practitioner. Over-enthusiasm is transparent and may appear false.
- No, but trainees should exercise emotional intelligence about when to show enthusiasm (that is, pick your moments).

How can a trainee lawyer demonstrate leadership?

- Get involved in firm committees or initiatives and organise social events.
- Get involved in professional/community organisations.
- Suggest how to progress a matter before receiving instructions.
- Seek opportunities to project manage appropriate smaller tasks in a large matter.
- Mentor and delegate work to seasonal clerks.
- Participate in seminars.
- Graduates should focus on the basics

 be proactive, enthusiastic, smart,
 commercial, reliable the rest will
 snowball.

The key to a successful trainee year is having the right attitude. If you participate and communicate, are enthusiastic, perceptive, genuine and consistently deliver excellent work, you should pass the year with flying colours.

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