

Tipping the scales of success

Life in a larger law firm can be demanding. Surrounded by intelligent, driven people and clients with high expectations, it sometimes feels like no matter how hard you try it's not enough. However, over time, young lawyers can develop and succeed in a law firm environment by modelling the best of those around them.

This article outlines five key tips to success.

1. Read to develop your technical expertise

Yes, you've probably heard it before, and thought "Yeah, sounds nice in theory, but I don't have the time".

Unfortunately, that excuse isn't going to cut it. The best lawyers make the time to read the latest decisions and relevant commentary, and young lawyers need to do the same. This is a key plank of honing your craft. Whether it be half an hour per day on the train, or a daily habit when you arrive at work, it is impossible to underestimate the importance of reading. It is a daily habit of successful lawyers.

2. Say "yes" to things that scare you

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "Do one thing every day that scares you". For a young lawyer, an example of this might be giving a client presentation, or attending a networking event where you know no one. Pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone will help you to develop as a lawyer. It will also allow those around you to see your development – perhaps from the graduate who attended presentations, or prepared the slides, to the first or second year lawyer who does a part of the presentation.

3. Make the broadest contribution you can

Law firms expect a lot more than just technical expertise. When applications for promotion are considered, partners will look at involvement in firm activities, such as recruitment and business development. You are operating in a team environment and you are expected to be a team player.

Young lawyers are often asked to be involved in the recruitment process, typically as a "buddy" for potential vacation clerks. Effective recruitment is vital to the continued strength of a firm, so young lawyers should make the effort to contribute where asked. Business development is also essential. Young lawyers need to consider other things they can do, aside from billable work, to build their profile in the area they work in – for example, by writing client articles or attending seminars. Many small steps over time can make a big difference.

4. Take responsibility for your career

Young lawyers need to be proactive. If there is work you think you can do, speak up. Speaking up doesn't mean complaining. Rather, put a positive spin on it: tell your supervising partner that you are particularly interested in a specific area and that you'd like to get more work in that area. When you do get the work, take ownership of it and make it your own. This involves taking initiative. However, it is also important to know when you need help from someone more experienced.



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BY MASTERING A FEW FUNDAMENTALS, YOU CAN MAKE YOUR MARK IN THE COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT OF A LARGER FIRM.

5. Maintain your contacts

Don't underestimate the importance of catching up with that old uni friend for a glass of wine on a Friday night. Maintaining your contacts from university is really important. People you went to university with may one day be colleagues, clients, barristers or even judges, as well as mates.

Conclusion

Leadership guru Robin Sharma says: "Success lies in a masterful consistency around a few fundamentals. It really is simple. Not easy. But simple."¹

He's right: armed with these five fundamentals, young lawyers can make a good start on building their own path to success in a larger law firm environment. ●

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¹ Robin Sharma, www.robinsharma.com/blog/09/robins-73-best-business-and-success-lessons.