

# On a learning curve

## HOW CAN JUNIOR LAWYERS DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES FROM THEIR PEERS AND BUILD THEIR REPUTATION? HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR GRADUATES.

Most of us spend our final years at university constantly searching for that elusive graduate job. Entry level law positions are so competitive that most of us are forced to swap seven-day weekends for manic study, extra-curricular activities, countless hours volunteering and relentless stalking of potential work experience opportunities online.

Those who obtain a graduate position may be hit by the realisation that while the university learning curve appeared steep, the junior lawyer learning curve is a sheer cliff.

So how can one ease the learning curve? And how can junior lawyers distinguish themselves from their peers and build their reputation as a junior lawyer?

Before one can exceed expectations one has to meet expectations. Although senior practitioners will not expect you to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the law, they will expect you to be able to produce work which is polished, considered and completed within an appropriate timeframe.

As a junior lawyer, building your colleague's trust in the quality of your work is crucial.

Lawyers are inherently time poor, so if you save your senior practitioner from extensively amending and revising your work, you are likely to graduate from the mundane work to the more complex sooner.

Further, never underestimate the importance of having a good attitude and work ethic. This means being receptive to criticism and completing even the most rudimentary tasks without complaint. Being useful to your principals is key.

Once you feel that you can deliver on the basics, then you can widen your focus to improving your working knowledge of the law, increasing your networks and considering how you can progress your career.

### Know your practice area

Foremost, it is important to get across the law within your practice group.

Developing your knowledge and understanding of the cross-section of legislation which is relevant to your practice area will be surprisingly useful. Obtain a copy/summary/commentary of the relevant legislation and read it on the train home

or when you have a moment or two of down time. Although most of us may not possess a photographic memory, increasing your general knowledge of the applicable legislation will be a useful asset and demonstrate your interest in the area.

For those who work in a transaction based group, obtain copies of standard form contracts and other precedent documents and spend the time carefully reading through these. Skills develop with experience, and reviewing documents from various transactions is a good way to fast-track your experience and knowledge base.

### Be informed

Next, sign-up to various e-alerts, legal blogs and case-flashes.

If taking a quick break from work, have a read through the highlights of a recent case or a competitive law firm's recent article. Reading articles as a part of your daily routine requires only a short time commitment and it will greatly assist in building your general knowledge of the law and the specific legal issues which may be



affecting your practice area. It is also a good way to become familiar with competitor law firms who have similar practice groups.

There are a multitude of free subscription services which source relevant law firm articles, legislative updates and case-flashes and send them to you in a daily email. For example, Mondaq ([www.mondaq.com](http://www.mondaq.com)) and Lexology ([www.lexology.com](http://www.lexology.com)) allow you to personalise the content of your daily email so you will only receive links which are relevant to your area of interest.

## Demonstrate an awareness of business development

Should you have a moment or two of down time consider drafting an article about a relevant recent case or legislative change.

Not only will this develop your knowledge base of the law, but it will also demonstrate an interest in business development and marketing, which for many senior practitioners is an essential part of their role. Should your firm decide to publish the article and note your contribution, it will also assist in building your profile.

## Never forget the importance of networking

You will be surprised at the power of networking. Your fellow practitioners may be a referral source or a future employment prospect. A good way to capitalise on your existing networks is to create or build upon a LinkedIn profile. Consider how you can maximise your LinkedIn profile by following groups, adding skills and sharing relevant case-flashes.

When meeting people at a networking event, exchanging business cards is a good way to create an impression. At the end of the night, try to jot down a few key points about each person you have met on the back of their business card. This may help you to remember their name, or some details about the person when you next meet them and assist as an icebreaker.

Further, never underestimate the importance of internal networking. No matter where you work, building your internal reputation is essential for your career progression. One good way to do this may be by sending around internal case-flashes or forwarding on a recent case to your colleagues which provides some useful commentary on a relevant point of law.

## Undertake a self-analysis

Having the humility and self-awareness to regularly conduct a self-assessment is vital. Consider your weaknesses and try to address these when moving forward. Never be afraid to ask your supervisors for feedback and try to take on board any comments or criticisms they make.

If you feel that you are not getting the exposure or type of work that you like, take steps to correct the balance. Consider volunteering after-hours to increase your skill-base and network with other lawyers.

## Enjoy your work

Although life as a junior lawyer isn't always glamorous, it is important to find your work interesting, engaging and fun. Being passionate about your work and your team is likely to filter into the quality of work produced, so ensure that you are working in an environment which inspires you to do your best.

Given the large exodus of junior lawyers from the legal profession, finding your work interesting and stimulating is vital to ensuring that you can go the distance. ■

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