From Classroom to Boardroom:
How you can prepare for practice

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INTRODUCTION

• Objective: To help law students make the leap “from classroom to boardroom”

• Overview:
  • 20 tips
    • under 4 broad categories:
      • Professionalism
      • Interpersonal Skills
      • Work Product
      • Engagement

• Your Participation is Welcome
PROFESSIONALISM
1. Be Professional:

- Dress professionally; act professionally.
- Err on the side of conservatism in your dress and conduct.
- Make sure that the lines between your work life and social life don’t get too blurry.
2. Be Mature:

- Conduct yourself with maturity. Reputations are established quickly.
- Try to stay out of office gossip and politics.
- Assume anything you say to someone else in the firm will be repeated.
PROFESSIONALISM

3. *Be Ethical:*

- Remember your duty of confidentiality and your duty of loyalty to your client.
- If you are concerned about something, approach your mentor or an appropriate senior person at the firm to discuss it.
- Be truthful.
4. Be Responsive/Client Centric:

• Treat the assigning lawyer as a client, and always keep in mind the external client.
• Make sure that you have clarity regarding deadlines and make sure you meet them.
• If you are at risk of missing a deadline, communicate with the lawyer well in advance of the deadline, and provide a strategy for managing the issue.
4. Be Responsive/Client Centric:
   - Learn about clients and their businesses.
   - Return calls and emails promptly.
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS
5. Be Confident:

- You may be new at this but you are here because you have potential.
- Project confidence. It makes others more confident in you.
- Remember, there is a fine line between confidence and arrogance.
6. *Be Communicative:*

- Communicate, but do it wisely. Figure out what mode of communication will work best based on the context.
- E-mail has its place, but don’t over rely on it. It can be a blunt instrument for more nuanced communications.
6. Be Communicative:

- Meeting in person or talking by phone are often better ways to move matters forward.
- Approach every meeting/interaction with an assigning lawyer by determining what you need to impart in the meeting and what you need to get from it.
INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

6. Be Communicative:
   • Make sure that all your written communications are polished and persuasive.
   • Make sure that your oral communications are concise.
7. **Be a Good Listener/Observer:**

- Think before you speak. Use your emotional intelligence to gauge when to speak and when to listen.
- Pay attention to your own body language and that of others.
- Be mindful of generational differences.
- Observe senior lawyers and learn from them how they conduct themselves and handle their practices.
8. Be Respectful:

- Respect everybody, regardless of their role within the firm or the firm’s hierarchy.
- Some of your best “allies” will be support staff.
- Never be late – ever.
9. Be Grounded:

• Take time for life outside the office.
• Try not to let the stresses of practice get the better of you.
• Maintain your sense of humour.
10. Be Resourceful:

- Familiarize yourself with firm resources.
- Take responsibility for getting the most out of your mentors (formal and informal).
- Remember that the assigning lawyer may not always give you all the facts you require to complete your assignment.
11. Be Organized:

- Stay on top of your to do list and deadlines.
- Keep a reminder system for documenting all important dates.
- Keep your files (hard and soft copy) organized.
- Keep your office tidy – it will keep you calm and will project an organized image.
12. Be Efficient:

- Manage your time carefully. Avoid distractions by dividing up your work day.
- Focus on the task at hand. Check e-mail periodically but not compulsively.
- Learn to delegate appropriately, to provide clear instructions and offer feedback.
12. Be Efficient:

- Make sure that you have an understanding of the basics of law firm economics (billable hours, write-offs etc.).
- Make sure that you capture the time you spend on files (billable and non-billable).
- Don’t write off your own time.
- Complete your time sheets daily.
13. Be Meticulous:

• Law is a very detail-oriented profession, so make sure that you approach everything you do with that in mind.
• Proofread everything carefully.
• Making mistakes is part of learning, but try to avoid making mistakes.
13. Be Meticulous:

- If you think you have made a mistake, don’t panic – it is usually fixable.
- Don’t bury it or try to fix it on your own. Concealed mistakes may lead to more serious issues.
14. Be Creative:

- Think!
- You are a “fresh set of eyes.”
- Don’t be afraid to respectfully play “devil’s advocate”, and speak up if you notice a helpful fact, legal argument, or have a fresh take on strategy.
ENGAGEMENT
ENGAGEMENT

15. Be Proactive:

• Figure out your “target market” of lawyers to work with; seek out work from them.
• Contemplate what the next steps might be and offer to assist with completing them.
• Go through proper channels before communicating externally.
16. Be Engaged:

- Put yourself out there. Be visible at applicable firm events, seminars and practice group meetings.
- Seek out feedback (at appropriate points).
- Follow up to see what happens on files in which you are involved.
- Stay on top of current events, especially the business news.
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17. Be Dedicated:

- Take on as much work as you can reasonably handle. If you are busy and productive, you will be happier.

- Work begets work. Say “yes” to work unless doing so would risk negatively affecting your existing commitments, the new commitment or both.

- Convey a sense of urgency. Be the person who drives matters to closure.
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18. Be Accountable:

• Take ownership of your assignments. Busy lawyers are happiest when you take things off their plate and deal with them.

• It is expected that you will check in regularly to advise on the status of matters and to identify issues.
18. Be Accountable

- Wherever possible, present a recommendation for confirmation by the assigning lawyer.
- Don’t come to a lawyer with problems without first having thought through a possible solution.
ENGAGEMENT

19. Be Helpful:

- Help your internal and external clients.
- Help your peers.
- Strive to be viewed as a “team player” by lawyers, students and staff.
- Display a positive attitude about the work you are doing.
20. *Be Cool:* 

- Stay calm, even in the face of pressure. It will earn you a great deal of respect.
- If something upsets you, take a step back and coolly consider why, and determine what the best approach is for dealing with it. Don’t let your emotions dictate the outcome.
QUESTIONS?
THANK YOU!