

Standing out from the crowd

Tom Moyes shares some top tips & advice on starting a career in the legal profession

A career in law is an exciting prospect for any young professional, with a wealth of opportunity for engaging and varied work. However, getting started can be a daunting prospect, with a highly competitive market of graduates and trainees, it can be difficult to know how to secure the best start in a legal career and stand out from the crowd.

Going into any profession, people are often advised to 'stand out from the crowd', but what does this really mean? Demonstrating some of the key skills and abilities required in the legal profession is the best way to shine amongst other applicants and young professionals.

As a service industry, much of a legal professional's time is devoted to interacting with clients. For these relationships to be a success, it is important to quickly build rapport and cultivate an approachable persona to ease communication between the firm and the client.

Being a confident social communicator is a great way to stand out, but it does not come naturally to everyone. For many it is a learned skill, and working on this skill ahead of a legal role will be highly beneficial. Attending networking events can build confidence for communicating in a professional context, so when the opportunity to interview arrives a candidate is able to demonstrate readiness to work with clients and build strong professional relationships.

Practising communication extends to a variety of methods. Beth Brindley, solicitor apprentice at Blacks Solicitors, suggests building a strong LinkedIn profile: 'Having a professional online presence is key in law. It allows you to stay visible in the industry and expand your connections, making it easier to network in the long run, and demonstrating to potential employers that you are engaged in the industry.'

Practice interviews

Interview situations are stressful for most people, and do not always present an applicant at the same level of confidence they would exhibit professionally. Finding a way to be as comfortable and confident as possible in an interview will help an applicant better present their professional ability.

Practising interview scenarios is the best way to prepare for these situations, but is not something most people do. For those that are nervous or uncomfortable in interview scenarios, or even those who do feel confident, it is better to practise interviewing as much as possible. This will cultivate a more comfortable attitude when it comes to real-world experience, and better prepare applicants to respond to challenging questions.

Beth Brindley, comments: 'Interviewers will not only look at your skills, but whether you will fit in with the firm, so do your research on how the firm approaches practice.'

'Although many employers have similar practices, demonstrating your awareness of the subtle differences, and highlighting how you can fulfil their specific expectations will make a difference.'

Preparation and practise go a long way to making an impact at an interview, and a confidently handled meeting with an employer could be the difference between success and failure.

Get work experience

There is no better way to understand the legal profession than to get involved with a practical professional environment. Gaining work experience with a firm not only demonstrates commitment to the profession, but also exposes an aspiring legal professional to the way solicitors operate, providing key insights into the skills and qualities most desired.

Victoria Adamson, trainee solicitor at Blacks Solicitors, suggests: 'Try to gain experience in different legal settings. Exploring firms of different sizes and

specialities, even for a day or two, will give you a great idea of the options available for your early career and help you find the avenue you most want to pursue.'

Much like any profession, law can be quite daunting to anyone hoping to enter and start a career, and even understanding how an organisation is structured could be confusing. By gaining work experience in a firm, young professionals will begin to see who is responsible for different elements of work, and how qualified solicitors approach their tasks.

Beth Brindley adds: 'Taking the time to get some work experience in law is enormously beneficial. Many firms are keen to offer work experience opportunities, and understanding how a firm operates is invaluable for demonstrating knowledge of the profession at interview stage.'

Be prepared for knockbacks

Even the most competitive candidates can expect to receive some rejections and failures, so be prepared. Starting in a new field can be difficult, and it is important to remember that everyone makes mistakes and it's not always possible to succeed on the first try.

Victoria Adamson comments: 'Be patient, persistent, and resilient. Most people experience rejections and knockbacks when applying for roles in the legal profession, but it is important to remember that you will find a role where you want to be.'

Rejections are part of the process of job hunting, and it is valuable to be mentally robust and take a positive approach toward the application process. Take into account any feedback received, work on weaknesses, and persevere while addressing professional development opportunities.

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Tom Moyes, training partner, Blacks Solicitors (www.lawblacks.com). For insight into overcoming obstacles and achieving career success, visit NLJ's jobs hub at [www.newLawjournal.co.uk/content/nlj-jobs-career-hub](http://www.newlawjournal.co.uk/content/nlj-jobs-career-hub).

