

## SUCCESS TIPS: JOINING A FIRM (PART I)

Lydia Anderson-Dana

*Stoll Berne*

Hansary A. Laforest

*Sussman Shank LLP*

Holly J. Martinez

*Perkins Coie LLP*

Traci Ray, moderator

*Barran Liebman LLP*

# Learning the Ropes 2021

## Success Tips for Lawyers Joining Firms

The Top 10 List – Things You Need to Do to Be a Successful Associate

**1. Do good work.**

- This is the minimum.
- A “draft” document is a myth. Every “draft” finished should be polished and complete.
- Make yourself available.
- Learning your craft is an investment in yourself.

**2. Communication skills / take responsibility for mistakes.**

- Adapt your style to your client’s, your staff, and the partner-in-charge.
- Mistakes are expected, but inform the partner-in-charge as soon as possible.
- Ask questions. The more direction you get from the partner, the higher quality the work product and the more efficient you will be.

**3. Perspective—be client focused.**

- Everyone is your client—associates, partners, and the firm’s actual clients.
- Be client focused and put yourself in their shoes—what would they want?
- Take the initiative.
- The Portland legal community is very small.

**4. Understand that law is a business.**

- Understand the finances.
- Add value.
- Manage and bill your time –learn how to write effective billing narratives.
- Have a system and do it consistently.

**5. Have a plan and set goals.**

- Set short-term and long-term goals that are measurable.
- Make sure your goals are realistic (equity vs. nonequity partners; myth vs. fact).
- Put those goals down on paper in a career development plan.
- Revisit the plan regularly with someone who will hold you accountable.
- One of your goals should be to build a book of business.

**6. Build relationships.**

- Clients can come from anywhere.
- Follow your passions.
- Think of rainmaking as a team activity.
- Don’t forget internal / existing clients.
- Seek out champions and mentors; they are different roles.

**7. Work well with staff.**

- Learn how to delegate.
- Support staff talk to one another and between firms.
- The support staff will know more than you do. Accept it and get over any attorney vs. legal assistant hierarchical misconceptions.
- Set your boundaries with the support staff.

**8. Understand the culture and politics of the firm.**

- Pay attention to and understand the firm culture—whether as a potential applicant or as an associate already working there—and remember that culture may vary substantially between practice groups.
- Be yourself while also being professional and in touch with the firm’s culture.
- Seek mentors within the firm to help you understand the firm’s culture and navigate its political landscape.

**9. Take care of yourself.**

- Drink water and get sleep.
- Find ways to combine personal health and professional development.
- Don’t feel guilty about spending a little time or money on self-care.

**10. It’s a career, not just a job.**

- Think of yourself as a portable asset.
- Don’t burn bridges

Traci Ray  
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## Success Tips: Joining a Firms Additional Resources

### **American Bar Association:**

Young Lawyers Division: [http://www.americanbar.org/groups/young\\_lawyers.html](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers.html)

Publications: [http://www.americanbar.org/groups/young\\_lawyers/publications.html](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers/publications.html)

21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Building Challenge

[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/labor\\_law/membership/equal\\_opportunity/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/labor_law/membership/equal_opportunity/)

**Oregon State Bar Oregon New Lawyers Division:** <http://www.osbar.org/onld>

### **Multnomah Bar Association:**

Multnomah Lawyer newsletter: <https://mbabar.org/about/newsletter.html>

Young Lawyers Section: <https://mbabar.org/YLS>

**Oregon Attorney Assistance Program:** [www.aaap.org](http://www.aaap.org)

*inSight* newsletter: <https://aaap.org/in-sight-archive/>

*The Curmudgeon's Guide to Practicing Law*, by Mark Herrmann