

What You Need To Know As A Summer Associate

Law360, New York (June 17, 2015, 3:18 PM ET) -- Summer associates are in the throes of trying to impress law firms through their work, networking and the power of personality. To help them get a leg up, we asked attorneys what advice they wish they had received when they were summer associates. Here, more than 25 lawyers share words of wisdom.

Matthew Benedetto, WilmerHale



"Be yourself! Having success in this profession sometimes means going back to basics. Whoever you will become as a lawyer — whatever style you will eventually exude with confidence, whether arguing in court or negotiating a deal — must start with being comfortable in your own skin. Your way of practicing law may not turn out to be flashy or aggressive or resemble anything like what you've seen on television (and that's perfectly fine). Your colleagues, your bosses and ultimately your clients will appreciate that you are genuine and will come to trust your counsel all the more."

Christopher L. Carmody Jr., GrayRobinson PA



"Pen and paper. As a summer associate, you are always on call, whether at lunch, in the halls or even having a drink. If there is an attorney present, you could get an assignment. And that is a good thing. You want the attorney discussing the case with you and viewing you as a resource. But that also means you may get an assignment. During my 2L summer, I received assignments in all the above places and also a few others (bathroom, break room, parking garage). It is good training, since you are always on call with a client. Pen and paper."

Heath Cheek, Bell Nunnally & Martin LLP



"There's a temptation as summer associates to treat projects as if you were an associate (i.e., getting them done quickly and efficiently), but that's not the correct tactic. Instead, as a summer associate, you should spend as much time as you need to get the project done perfectly. The quality of your work as a summer associate is way more important than the quantity of your work. Beyond that, don't forget to make friends with your fellow clerks. I'd much rather hire someone who has an ability to foster camaraderie than someone who views his or her fellow clerks as competition."

Edwin F. Chociey Jr., Riker Danzig Scherer Hyland & Perretti LLP



"Answer the question that is asked. Make sure that you understand what you are being asked to do — both the substantive issues that you are researching and the type of work product needed, e.g., formal memorandum, brief or brief point, email, etc. Ask questions of the assigning attorney if you need clarification on the assignment. Sometimes, the answer is that the law is unclear or unsettled, or that you could not locate a case to support a given proposition. Carefully proofread your written work product — typographical errors substantially detract from your writing."

Richard J. Cino, Jackson Lewis PC



"As a summer associate, you have a fabulous opportunity to immerse yourself in the operations of a firm, and meet and interact with experienced attorneys. Doing great work is a given. But don't just come to the office, sit down at your desk, work and leave. Instead, become part of the fabric of the firm. Be respectful to everyone, from administrative support to the shareholders. Walk around, greet co-workers — let your personality shine through as you strike up conversations unrelated to the law and become part of the office's culture. One summer is plenty of time to make that type of impact."

Megan Easley, Susman Godfrey LLP



"You probably already know that you should observe what young associates do when they're not taking you out for delicious and lengthy lunches. But another important, and more subtle, point to look for is how your firm is structured and operated. How are partners compensated? How do they get cases? And, as a result, what are their relationships with one another and ultimately with you? Whether or not you think you will be a partner one day (or even want to be), the partnership structure helps define your firm's culture and affects the satisfaction of its associates."

Abbi S. Freifeld, Roig Lawyers



"Being a summer associate can be an overwhelming experience, but it's your time to show your potential to a future employer. The best advice I can give to summer associates is to treat your summer experience as one long interview. Make sure your work product is of exceptional quality. It is not the amount of work you produce, but the quality that counts. Also, be courteous to all who cross your path and conduct yourself in a professional manner, as those are the impressions you want your employer to remember."

Nancy J. Geenen, Suann Ingle Associates LLC



"Carry a notebook that you use as a diary. Write down key words and phrases about every assignment. Read the pleadings and case file. Make sketches about the case. Look for key messages and recurring themes. Think big picture: What is the story behind the dispute? Restate the assignment like headline news, then organize your research strategy. Bring up odd facts and challenges along the way, don't wait until the last minute, and get feedback — ask for it. Listen more than you talk. Take every opportunity to go to court."

Jason Gould, Carlton Fields Jordan Burt



"That question you're unsure whether to ask ... ask it. Invariably, when I see a summer associate make a misstep, it's not due to lack of intellectual firepower but rather not having asked enough questions, or the right questions, when receiving an assignment. How soon do you need this? Would you like a verbal report or written memo? How many hours should I spend? Does the client have special timekeeping or other requirements? Partners and associates should supply those kinds of details without being asked, but we get busy, so summer associates should be proactive and ask to prevent miscommunications."

Paul Halasz, Day Pitney LLP



"A summer position with a law firm is a great opportunity for a law student to explore different practice areas and to get to know the firm. By seeking out assignments from a diverse range of attorneys, law students can at least get a taste of substantive legal areas they may not have previously considered but which may ultimately appeal to them. At the same time, summer associates should get to know the culture and working environment of an organization that may be their professional home for many years."

Michael Hamlin, Fish & Richardson PC



"I wish I had asked more questions as a summer associate. My advice to summer associates is to sit down with as many respected attorneys as possible and ask them how they were able to build successful and meaningful careers. Don't be concerned about bothering them or wasting their time. They will be honored by the request. You will find there are many different ways to achieve success in the legal field. Find the way that resonates most with you, and do that."

Andres Healy, Susman Godfrey LLP



"Don't be a work robot or an office ghost. Working hard and turning in great work product obviously is important, but so is showing the firm you are a person they want to spend half of every day with. Jump at every chance to spend real time with your future partners."

Brad Kaufman, Greenberg Traurig LLP



"My advice to summer associates is twofold: Learn everything you can about the firm and the practice of law in which you are most interested. Second, consider the summer to be one long job interview. Can you see yourself there? Do you like the people, because you will be spending a lot of time with them after you graduate? Can the attorneys see you there?"

Soniya D. Khemlani, Walsworth – WFBM LLP



"Take ownership in all projects assigned to you. Start from the beginning to grasp an understanding of your assignment so you are able to identify any additional issues that your superior may have not articulated or may not be aware exists. After turning in an assignment to your superior, make sure you continue to follow up through the end (i.e., ensure deadlines are met or whether further work is necessary)."

Rachel Kingrey, Gardere Wynne Sewell LLP



"Think about social events with alcohol as a test of judgment. There is no undoing the embarrassment that comes to the summer associate who had a few too many. Meet as many people as you can. When you do, listen more than you talk and don't be shy about asking questions."

Kymerly Kochis, Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP



"Be assertive. Whether asking for assignments or introducing yourself at a cocktail reception, it is important to interact with the lawyers and staff so you can decide if the firm is a good fit. Be open-minded and work hard. Expose yourself to different practice areas because this may be your only opportunity to determine what practice area is right for you. Work collaboratively with the firm's nonlegal staff. Staff can make your life easier and teach you practical skills that are not taught in law school."

Kate Muetting, Sanford Heisler Kimpel LLP



"Now is the time to start building your reputation. I'm sure you already understand the importance of doing great work. Additionally, in managing the summer program for Sanford Heisler Kimpel, I advise summers not to miss out on the many opportunities they have to cultivate relationships. The attorneys I summered with have remained friends, but have also remained colleagues in two subsequent clerkships and have been helpful in my career. One, for example, was the contact I needed to secure a job with my current firm. I think it's a mistake for summers to think of these opportunities as optional."

JP Motley, O'Melveny & Myers LLP



"Be yourself and be confident. You have earned the job as a summer associate. The firm liked you in the interview process and believes you have potential to be a successful part of the team. Clients and lawyers within your firm want to work with someone who is confident in their abilities and themselves. You, of course, don't want to be cocky, but you want to leave your clients and team members with the feeling that you can be trusted and will give the assignment your best effort."

Allison Nichols, Schiff Hardin LLP



"Don't be timid. It's natural to feel anxious about getting an offer at the end of the summer, but don't let your nerves prevent you from taking full advantage of this opportunity. Ask questions, whether they are about the substance of an assignment or firm policies and culture. This shows that you are engaged and thinking critically about what you observe. Most importantly, take the initiative to develop relationships with the attorneys around you — both partners and associates. Learn about their work and their interests. These bonds will be so important when you return to the firm after law school."

Michael O'Shaughnessy, McDermott Will & Emery LLP



"Your professional reputation starts here. This is the opportunity to make your first impression, which will influence how people perceive you for years to come. Don't merely float through research assignments, but make dedicated efforts to add value to projects. Consider context and how your research helps the cause. Perform maturely and intelligently, and the attorneys will consider you someone that can actually contribute to the firm. They'll want to work with you, and will support you during future reviews. On the other hand ... get drunk at events and threaten to fight partners, and they won't soon forget it."

Sam Sammataro, Turner Padgett Graham & Laney PA



"Summer associates should be open-minded about the type of law they want to pursue. While they may walk in the door on the first day of summer with a particular focus in mind, they may find a passion in a completely different area. Or they may realize that their dream practice wasn't what they thought it would be. It's imperative to listen to and learn from all of the attorneys at the firm, because, at our core, attorneys are teachers who love to share our knowledge and experience — and a summer associate can glean valuable information by being open to learning from everyone."

Monica C. Segura, Rumberger Kirk & Caldwell PA



"There are several words of wisdom I would share with summer associates. Confirm with the assigning attorney the scope of all assignments. Always ask for a deadline. If you cannot meet a deadline, advise the assigning attorney. Advise each attorney that you have other assignments and have the assigning attorneys give you priority of the assignments. The best advice one can give a summer associate is to always try his or her best and realize that you are not born an attorney and will always be learning."

Namita T. Shah, Day Pitney LLP



"Two pieces of advice for summer associates: (1) network and (2) treat each assignment as work for a client. Summer associates should try to meet as many attorneys both inside and outside the firm as they can to not only make contacts but to also learn about the vastly different practice areas that exist. There are entire practice areas that many summer associates don't know exist because they aren't covered in law school. Obviously quality of work is key. Every piece of work and interaction with an attorney at the firm should be seen as a client deliverable or interaction."

Brandie Smith, Womble Carlyle Sandridge & Rice PLLC



"When I was a summer associate I wish I knew that getting an offer was the easy part! You see, impressing all the important people for eight weeks in the summer is a piece of cake when compared to actually practicing every day as an associate. Learning the practice of law as well as the business of a law firm can be extremely overwhelming. However, when the people you work with are invested in your success and in you as a human being, it's worth it. So, get ready."

Joo C. Webb, Walsworth – WFBM LLP



"Advice I wish had been given as a summer associate is simple: Think about the question you are about to ask your supervisor before you ask the question. As a young associate starting out, you may feel you know nothing and the best way to learn is to ask questions. However, there is greater value in investigating and attempting to discover an answer on your own first. Struggling through the analysis will result in sharpening your mind, and will show your supervisor that you are conscientious, motivated and smart. You will stand out from the pack."

Laurence Weiss, Michelman & Robinson LLP



"One piece of advice that I wish I had received is to get to know, and plan to keep in touch with, fellow summer associates. The summer program is a great opportunity to expand your professional network with talented and ambitious peers from other schools who you might not otherwise have had the occasion to meet. Not every summer associate in your program will return to the firm, but many who don't will go on to do amazing things. Developing and maintaining these relationships is one easy path to a network of potential clients and referral sources down the road."

Lewis S. Wiener, Sutherland Asbill & Brennan LLP



"I wish I had known that every attorney in the firm is a potential client. As a summer associate and then as an associate, the first people to 'buy' your hours are the partners in your firm. Understand your clients' needs, be responsive and follow up internally just as you would externally."

John Zavitsanos, Ahmad Zavitsanos Anaipakos Alavi & Mensing PC



"We know our clerks are intelligent. We look for signs of initiative and tireless determination. While we have many social activities, I think most of those are worthless and awkward and it's not where I judge our clerks. It's impressive if a clerk beats me to the office at 7:30 a.m. many days or if someone doesn't wait to be spoon-fed tasks but pursues

a legal theory themselves. It matters if everything they write is flawless and typoless. Initiative is not just writing a great 40-page memo, but thinking to add a one-page executive summary for the client."

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