

What Kind of Lawyer Do I Want to Be?

Good question! This is the *single most important thing you need to figure out* to create a career that you will truly love!⁸

Some people enter law school and think they know exactly what they want to do (which doesn't always hold up, by the way) and others have no idea. Whether you're the former or the latter, it is essential that you know what your interests, goals and priorities are before you can figure out (with our help) the right career move for you. Below are some exercises that should help you get off on the right foot. *And remember* – the kind of lawyer you want to be may evolve as you do – but as long as you have a sense of what YOU want to get out of your career at any given point, you will be very happy!

Step 1: Know Thyself.

To figure out what will make you happy in life (career and otherwise), you have to figure out, well, what makes you happy. It may sound difficult and tedious – but it's not. In addition to these preliminary questions, refer to Appendix A for additional self-assessment exercises and resources.

1. What is your ideal practice setting?
 - Do you work best in a formal hierarchy or a more casual setting?
 - How important is on-the-job training or a formal mentor system?
 - Do you prefer to work as part of a team or individually?
2. Are you interested in a certain practice area?
 - What subjects appealed to you in your undergraduate studies?
 - What do you enjoy reading about?
 - What issues (legal or otherwise) do you care about?
3. What skills do you most enjoy using?
 - Do you enjoy research, analysis, and writing?
 - Is it important to you to have lots of people contact?
 - Do you work best with several projects at once, or one at a time?
4. What personal commitments do you have outside of law school/work?
 - How much time do you want to have for friends and family?
 - How much control would you like over your work schedule?
 - How much money do you need to live comfortably?
 - Where (geographically) do you want to live/work?

⁸ We can also help you with the other one: “do I want to be a lawyer at all?”

5. How do you define success?

- Prestige – How important is it to you that others perceive your job as important?
- Helping people – Who? How quickly? How many?
- Compensation?
- Fame?
- Power?
- Work/life balance?

6) Name five of your favorite things to do (hobbies, jobs, activities, etc.):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

7) Name five famous people whose job you would love to have:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

8) Name five people *you know personally* whose job you would love to have:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

9) What is your biggest accomplishment? Why?

10) What was your favorite job ever?

11) What would you do *tomorrow* if you won 500 million dollars tonight?
What would you do in five years? Ten?

Step 2: Know Thy Legal Market.

Okay, now that you are completely self-aware, how do you take that valuable knowledge and apply it to your job search? Well, the next step is to develop an understanding of the legal market so you can figure out how to apply your interests and talents in the most productive way possible.

Get It Straight from the Proverbial Horse's Mouth

Hopefully your extensive self-analysis led you to an epiphany of sorts about what you want to do with your law degree. Maybe you still don't know for sure, but you have a few hunches about what practice areas or settings might interest you. Maybe there was something you read about, saw on TV or heard about from a friend that has stuck in your head. Or maybe you only went to law school to put off career planning for another three years and don't want to talk about this in the first place!

Regardless, the best way to find out about the legal practice areas and settings (collectively, the "legal market"), is to talk to practicing attorneys!

"But I don't KNOW any practicing attorneys!" Well, fear not, because they are extremely easy to find, and D.C., in particular, happens to be full of them!⁹

Most Likely Places to Find Lawyers in Washington, D.C.

- 1. CDO Programs!** As we might have mentioned before – come early and come often to all of the fabulous programs we will be putting together for you. Most of these programs feature *practicing attorneys who come to the Law School specifically to speak to students about legal careers!* If you think these programs might present an excellent opportunity for you to dip your toes in the cool waters of networking, you are 100% right!
- 2. Through Friends, Family and Former Employers.** You may not think you know anyone that does something you're interested in, but if you start asking around, I bet you'd be surprised that your mother's second cousin's husband's friend's daughter has a fascinating legal career! As they say – you'll never know unless you ask!
- 3. Job Fairs, Career Events and Conferences.** In addition to CDO programming, there are hundreds of other legal organizations that host job fairs, career and recruiting events and conferences all designed to bring law students and practicing attorneys together. These events take place all over the country, but many of them take place right here in Washington, D.C.! These events are a great opportunity to speak with practicing attorneys who are interested in the same issues you are. To stay on top of these events, be sure to

⁹ Washington, D.C. has the highest *per capita* rate of lawyers of any state in the country. With over 276 lawyers per 10,000 people, D.C. has over ten times as many lawyers as the state with the second highest number – New York, which comes in at a paltry 20 lawyers per 10,000 people! See for yourself at http://www.averyindex.com/lawyers_per_capita.php.

read CDO emails and *Noteworthy*. In addition, many of the Law School student groups would also be good sources for information about these events.

3. Alumni Career Advisor Network. As we mentioned earlier, we maintain a database of alumni who have volunteered to speak to law students about their own career choices, including why they chose a particular practice area or setting, what internship and job prospects are like in the field and other general career advice. If you are nervous about networking, using this Network is a great first step!

4. State, Local and Voluntary Bar Associations. After you graduate, you will take the bar exam and join the state bar association of the state to which you are admitted. These **state bar associations** are excellent resources, and if you are located near an active chapter of one, it is a great opportunity to get involved and meet practicing attorneys.

Local bar associations – such as the Alexandria Bar Association – offer the same great networking opportunities, but are often overlooked.

Voluntary bar associations – associations of practicing attorneys interested in a particular practice area or setting, such as the Energy Bar Association or the Hispanic Bar Association of DC – are also fabulous ways to connect with practicing attorneys.

To get involved with these organizations, consider becoming a law student member of whichever section(s) you find most interesting. Attend section events – not only to meet people, but to get up to speed on the practitioner’s perspective on the legal issues you are interested in. A list of area state, local and voluntary bar associations is available on the DC Bar website.¹⁰

5. At Their Places of Employment! Okay, we’ll admit it – this one definitely seems hard. But if you are truly interested in a particular practice area or setting and have not been able to speak with a practicing attorney involved in that area or setting...then why not try reaching out directly to those attorneys? You can pinpoint attorneys that do things you’re interested in through law firm websites, West Legal, Martindale, or – for non-law firm attorneys, the Leadership Directories.¹¹

¹⁰ http://www.dcbbar.org/for_lawyers/resources/voluntaryBars.cfm

¹¹ Links to all these sites are available on the “[Online Job Search Resources](#)” section of the CDO website.