

3 Skills You Need To Have Before Finishing Your First Year

By **Kelly Knaub**

Law360, New York (July 19, 2016, 8:17 PM ET) -- Attorneys in their first year at a firm may get overwhelmed by trying to excel at everything, but experts say there are three essential skills newbie lawyers should focus on before finishing year one.

Doing Quality Work on Time

It's very hard to recover from getting off on the wrong foot, Kenneth E. Young, principal of national legal search and consulting firm Young Mayden LLC, told Law360. That's why associates must develop a reputation for doing quality work without missing deadlines, he said.

Young lawyers who go to work for large firms in particular usually know what they're getting into, such as working long hours and being expected to do high-quality work. After all, Young said, they're top law graduates being paid the most money of any young lawyers in the country, and in some cases more than judges who have been sitting on the bench at the federal and state level for 30 years.

"Typos are simply unacceptable. Getting something done right at the deadline is not acceptable," Young said. "Partners want to give work to people who are not going to cause them stress, and if they get something the day it's due at the last minute and it needs work, next time they're at the water cooler with a fellow partner they're going to share that with them. And associates who don't receive work usually don't last long at large law firms."

To avoid getting overwhelmed by multiple deadlines, communication between the partner — or whoever is giving out the work — and the associate is key, Young added.

If, for example, a partner gives the associate work that's due the next day, and the associate already has a deadline from another partner that same day, it's best for the associate to communicate up front that he or she doesn't want to let anybody down and to suggest that the two partners converse to see which assignment is more urgent, according to Young.

"The associate's got to be diplomatic and candid, and the partner will appreciate that," Young said.

Research Skills

By the end of year one, associates must also be adept at researching, according to BTI Consulting Group Inc. President Michael Rynowecer, who said you can never know too much about your client's business.

Not only will research make associates' work more interesting and relevant, he said, but also sharing it with other attorneys on their team to help everyone understand the client proves the associates can be a valuable resource — it also makes the partner look better to the client.

"Look for news, product announcements, earnings announcements for public companies and Wall Street analyst comments and coverage," Rynowecer said. "Be sure to read the trade publications for your client's industry. And most importantly, share the research in an easily digestible form so

your team can benefit as well.”

But first-year associates who are writing a motion or brief shouldn't spend too much time researching as if they're in a law school library writing a term paper, according to Lyndon Parker, managing director of JD Search Advisors LLC.

“You're writing something that's got to have an impact for a court or a hearing or an arbitrator or a client somewhere,” he said.

Developing a good sixth sense about what a client's options are when you're researching is also helpful, Parker noted, adding that first-years should be creative and show they can look for other ways to approach a problem.

It's also important that first years don't second-guess themselves by constantly seeking feedback from a reviewer or mentor, he added.

"Have confidence in your own work and don't be afraid to make mistakes in your early time when you're given an assignment," Parker said. "Because the only way you're going to learn is from making mistakes."

Marketing and Business Development

Working marketing and business development into their routine is another critical skill that associates should have by the end of their first year, according to John Remsen Jr., founder of consulting firm TheRemsenGroup.

"There are two kinds of lawyers in private practice. Lawyers with clients [and] lawyers who work for lawyers with clients," Remsen said. "Guess who has more control over their career? Guess who is making more money? Guess who is the last to get laid off during the recession? The lawyers with the clients. I would hope you'd want to be a lawyer with clients when you're 40, 45 years old."

The American Bar Association suggests that associates engage in about 100 hours per year — roughly two hours a week — of marketing and business development, Remsen noted, saying he encourages young associates to recognize how important it is.

Doing things they enjoy, such as writing, speaking, getting involved in organizations, showing up at events, and committing themselves to building their network are habits that will carry them forward and, if sustained, will pay off “big time” over the course of their career, he said.

"Clients hire lawyers, not law firms. It's clear," Remsen said. "And clients hire lawyers they know, they like and they trust. So if you have a 20-year friendship or acquaintance with someone, when you're 45 years old, you now have some gray hair and some expertise, and the people with whom you've built friendships, the people who are part of your network are now moving into situations where they may be able to hire and refer outside counsel."

Social media, which wasn't around 20 years ago, is another tool young associates can use, he added, saying it's amazing what LinkedIn can do, for example, to build relationships and reputation.

But, Remsen noted, it is also important to be authentic and sincere.

“If people sense you're just there to troll for business, people pick up on that,” Remsen said. “That's why you have to be passionate about what you do, because people pick up on that too and want to be around it.”

--Editing by Mark Lebetkin and Edrienne Su.