

Behind the Curtain: Navigating the Unwritten Rules of the Legal Workplace

Before the Assignment

Fully comprehend the project

- Questions up front prevent missteps later
- Clarity = Success!

Always know the following:

- Desired format (i.e. completed brief or transactional document; excerpt; internal or client facing memo; short answer)?
- Where does project fit into overall timeline of matter?
- Other team members?
- Anticipated hours spent?
- Expectations for status updates/check-ins?
- Deadline: soft or absolute?

Use Document Management System as resource

- Identify documents from similar or related matters
- Use as template/starting point
- Find relevant cases or statutes previously cited
- Match style and voice of assigning attorney

Additional resources

- Junior attorneys, librarians, paralegals are good sources of information (i.e. partner quirks/preferred style, precedent etc.)

During the Assignment

Documentation

- Keep track of your time
- Go back to your assigning attorney if you go over time or neglected to ask how much time to spend
- Evaluate when you should stop
- Keep track of search terms and research
- Keep your assignment parameters handy, and refer to them often

You hit a research "wall"

- Go back to the assigning attorney for guidance OR a mentor assigned to you at the firm
- Review the assignment again
- Discuss with other Summer Associates/Attorneys

Prioritizing Assignments

- Review the deadlines given to you, and prioritize the ones that have "hard" deadlines
- If the deadlines are similar, prioritize the ones of the most senior attorneys
- Learn how to gently say "no"
- Communicate your conflicts in respectful manner that conveys enthusiasm for the work/assigning attorney and also the conflict difficulty
- Learn who to ask for guidance regarding project conflicts (i.e. mentor, recruiter, section head)

After the Assignment

Follow-up

- Seek feedback and be open to areas for improvement
- Take initiative to obtain work in areas of interest
- Be accountable

Inter-personal Skills

- Positive, engaged and keen "can do" / team player attitude
- Mental health
 - Stay grounded and create a life outside of the office
 - Set boundaries – learn to say "no"
 - Try to stay calm
- Maturity
 - Be a good listener/observer
 - Use emotional intelligence- be mindful of generational & cultural differences
 - Be respectful and inclusive
 - Be confident, but not arrogant

Professionalism

- Attire & behavior
 - Err on conservative side
 - Beware social events & social media!
- Clear and polished communications
 - Use what is best for context (not always e-mail!)
- Duty of confidentiality and loyalty to client



Ideas: Law School/Law Firm Collaboration

- Law firm presentations/ lunches for students regarding professional expectations
- Sponsored law firm tours
- Direct outreach to affinity/First Gen student groups
- Co-Sponsor events with affinity groups

Presented by:

