

LEGAL CAREER TIPS

BY MUBANY

This is a series of lessons and tips that members of MuBANY's Board have learned in our legal careers thus far. Much of this is relevant for both public and private sector positions, and intended to assist current law students and young attorneys. This is a running list. Reach out with any additions you may have!

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MUSLIM BAR
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OF NEW YORK

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MENTORSHIP



HAVE MANY MENTORS—No one person can give you advice for every aspect of your career. Each person can provide you with their perspective, likely informed by their own experiences. The key is to identify what each person can teach or show you. Oftentimes, this will be dictated by what they naturally talk about or have written about.



HOW TO FIND MENTORS—There are many ways to find mentors, but before asking who you'd want advice from - first ask yourself what advice you need right now. That will then direct you to people with whom you want to speak. It is sometimes the case that you can find mentors through a formal mentorship program at your school or a relevant bar association, but directly contacting individuals via LINKEDin and leveraging your network (no matter how small) is also a great first step.

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MENTORSHIP CONT'D

↘ **DO YOUR RESEARCH BEFORE SPEAKING**—Answer these questions before reaching out:

Why do I want to speak to this person? What would I like to learn from this meeting or conversation?

What is it that I am interested in about their background? Is it their career trajectory, a case they worked on, or a specific experience they've had that I'd like to learn about—or anything else?

What are they working on? (if publicly available)

What have they spoken or written about publicly? (if publicly available)

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MENTORSHIP CONT'D



STRUCTURE THE CONVERSATION—As a mentee, you should be prepared to lead the conversation. There are usually three points covered in an initial conversation: the mentee's professional background, the mentor's professional background, and specific questions the mentee may have. If you are having a conversation, it is good to informally structure the conversation in a way that is most time efficient:

1) Introduce yourself - keep this short and high-level (similar to an elevator pitch!) and only mention relevant experiences. In your introduction, also expressly state what you would like to learn from this call/meeting.

2) Have a list of no more than 3-5 questions.

3) On timing: if a phone call - should be no more than 30 minutes. If in-person - should be no longer than 45 minutes to an hour.

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MENTORSHIP CONT'D



ASK WHAT THE BEST MEDIUM IS TO STAY IN TOUCH AFTER THE INITIAL MEETING—This is key. For some, texting might be best, others may prefer in-person or video calls, or email. But make sure you ask because everyone has different boundaries and preferences.



DON'T FORCE A MENTORSHIP RELATIONSHIP—Like with friends, you'll know in the first few interactions whether there is a "VIBE." Don't force it - no matter how relevant their experience is for you - it'll get awkward for both you and your mentor.

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MENTORSHIP CONT'D

↘ **LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION.** When asking for a letter of recommendation, always provide the following information:

- 1) The link to the organization/program/scholarship for which you are asking for a recommendation.
- 2) A high-level list of points/experiences that your recommender is familiar with and that you think could be covered in the recommendation (this is especially true if you are a former intern - list the projects you worked on and relevant skills you developed in that context),
- 3) Timeline - be clear about the deadline for submission. Always remember to follow-up and send gentle reminders to your recommenders!

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MENTORSHIP CONT'D



FOR A CONNECTION TO SOMEONE—If your mentor is connecting you to someone, proactively provide your mentor with a 3-4 line blurb about your background and why you would like to be connected to the person. Phrase these 3-4 lines as though they are written from your mentor's perspective. This will make it easy for your mentor to simply copy that blurb into the email to the connection, and add anything they'd like.

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SPONSORSHIP



“A MENTOR TALKS WITH YOU AND A SPONSOR TALKS ABOUT YOU”–

A sponsor is someone in a senior level or other influential role who can openly advocate on your behalf and vouch for your abilities to fast track your career. Sponsors will fight for you, uplift you, and support you. Sponsorship typically exists in the private sector.

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SPONSORSHIP CONT'D



FINDING A SPONSOR—The easiest way to find a sponsor is to build on your existing mentoring relationship. While mentors typically serve as advisers to help you define your goals and identify paths to get there; sponsors get you in place to achieve your goals.

Identify higher ups and seniors who inspire you and try to get to know them.

Let your sponsor see you in action. Sponsors can connect their proteges to career opportunities, advocate for their protege's advancement, publicly endorse them, but in return they will expect high performance.

Ask.

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APPLICATIONS



APPLY EVEN IF YOU ARE SHY BY A COUPLE YEARS FOR THE

EXPERIENCE PREFERRED—It is okay if you don't have the experience level needed, but use your judgment - if a posting is for an attorney who is 3-5 years out of law school, but you've been out only 2 years and have some solid relevant experience in that time – APPLY. Saying this especially to the women out there.



FORMAT AND PROOFREAD!!—Make sure your final product is clean, concise, and clear. Law and design might feel like they are worlds away from each other but clear and consistent formatting is the bare minimum. This includes catching any typos, making sure there are no extraneous lines, and that any descriptions of positions are in the active voice and are specific but succinct. Also, proofread, proofread, proofread.

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APPLICATIONS CONT'D

RESUMES—



KEEP IT SIMPLE—In the legal sector, your basic Microsoft Word template resume is the running norm. Highly designed resumes are rare, and it is not to say that you can't use that but you should make sure that however your resume is designed - it is easy to skim for relevant substantive information about your professional background.



RESUME LENGTH & ORGANIZATION—A standard rule of thumb for legal resumes is 1 page for every decade of your career. This means if you are under 10 years out of law school, your resume should be no longer than 1 page. In addition, after you have graduated your work experience should be placed before your education, unless for some reason your education takes precedence for a position.

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APPLICATIONS CONT'D

- **COVER LETTERS**—Cover letters should be organized using topic sentences for each paragraph after your introductory paragraph. In the introductory paragraph, you should clearly state the position for which you are applying, and identify (in no more than one or two sentences) why you are qualified or right for the position. The paragraphs following the introductory paragraph should touch on the most relevant experiences to the position, and why you are uniquely qualified and interested in the position. Each paragraph should have a topic sentence that indicates what the paragraph covers. Cover letters should not be more than one page, and should end with some sort of signature—whether typed or an e-signature.

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APPLICATIONS CONT'D

➤ **WRITING SAMPLES**—Writing samples should be substantive and be an example of the most relevant skills needed for the position for which you are applying. This could be a legal memorandum, research memorandum or any substantive document related to motion practice or contracts (dependent on relevant practice areas); these documents will exhibit your ability to research, analyze complex legal issues, and structure an argument. As mentioned in the sub-section entitled “Know how to speak about your relevant skills,” you want a writing sample that will allow you to speak about relevant skills. Also, it is good practice to create a cover page for your writing sample in which you provide a short one paragraph summary about the writing sample—including in what context you wrote it—and any other substantive points you want to highlight. Also, this paragraph is where you can flag if the writing sample is edited or redacted for purposes of the application. You can also request that the writing sample be kept confidential in this summary, if needed. NOTE: if you need to shorten a writing sample, you definitely can. And if you need to redact a writing sample, you can do that based on your employer’s practices.

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APPLICATIONS CONT'D

- **PDF THE FINAL SUBMISSION**—Unless otherwise specified by the application platform, all of the documents you upload for an application should be PDFs (this includes any slides). PDFs are synonymous with a final version of a document, because when a reviewer opens the document they can't accidentally change any content like one can in Word.

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INTERVIEWS

- **FOLLOW THE RULE OF THREE**—Come to every interview with three ideas you have for the role (i.e., issues/cases you'd want to work on or pitch), three interest areas in the current practice of the employer, and no more than three questions to ask at the end of the interview. You can also extend this rule to think about how you would describe your story and/or relevant professional experience. Anticipate what you may be asked and hone in on the three skills or experiences you want to make sure you mention in the interview.
- **KNOW YOUR NARRATIVE**—In advance of your interview, prepare a succinct narrative or pitch that describes what led you to this role, aligning your experiences to touch upon what brought about your interest in the role/area, your skill sets, and why you would be a perfect fit.

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INTERVIEWS CONT'D

- **KNOW HOW TO SPEAK ABOUT YOUR RELEVANT SKILLS**—In litigation-related interviews, this looks like being able to clearly and concisely discuss how you wrote a legal argument, including the method you used to research, how you determined which case law was most relevant, and how you structured your argument and applied it to the facts. To prepare, it might be helpful to write out bullet points before the interview.
- **KNOW YOUR APPLICATION**—If you submitted a writing sample with your application, know it well. Practice explaining it in a clear and concise manner as described above.

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INTERVIEWS CONT'D

↘ IT IS OKAY TO SAY "I DON'T KNOW"—

Be real and sincere where you can about what you know and acknowledge when you don't know something, especially if it is a specific question within a broader line of questioning.

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CAREER PLANNING

- **GRADES ARE NOT EVERYTHING**—Your grades are not determinative for clerkships and many other opportunities. While they are weighed heavily in many traditional legal settings, there seems to be a trend toward understanding whether an applicant has or can learn the desired skill-set, which is usually the ability to analyze complex legal concepts, legal research, and legal writing.
- **THE EVERY 3-5 YEAR ASSESSMENTS**—Every 3-5 years, like clock-work, you may have a moment where you ask yourself what you're doing. That's ok, just make sure that you are moving toward the goals you've set for yourself—it's not always a job move, but maybe a skills or practice area change. Be as intentional as you are able to in your career. Seek out mentors in these moments.

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CAREER PLANNING CONT'D



PRIORITIZE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIRST 5 YEARS OF YOUR CAREER—The law is a hierarchical sector where experience is valued. This means in the first part of your career, developing core legal skills is key—especially if you want to litigate or move into non-law related work down the line, where these transferable skills are your pitching point. These core skills include but are not limited to legal research, legal writing, and legal analysis. Once you have developed these skills, you can parlay them into many traditional and non-traditional legal positions. Also, if possible—make sure you leave each job with at least 1 to 2 writing samples or other relevant work product. NOTE: while many legal documents are confidential and privileged, there are ways to redact documents to ensure that they can be used in job applications—check with your employer on the practice at your workplace.

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CAREER PLANNING CONT'D

- **LOANS**—Law school in the United States is prohibitively expensive. Without a scholarship or a support system, it is an investment you may spend decades paying off. This cost definitely impacts career decisions, and it's ok to want to take a position solely to pay that off before you move into work that may not come with that paycheck, i.e. a public sector role. But during your time at the jobs that might help you pay off debt, prioritize skills development, as mentioned above.
- **EXPLORE EVERY AVENUE**—We need more judges, partners, politicians, policymakers, and founders from underrepresented communities! Don't rule anything out. Many of these paths can be assisted by foresight and planning at the beginning of one's career.

END.

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