

THE ROADMAP FOR EMPLOYMENT:
CONNECTING THE DOTS



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Acknowledgement

During my service as an interim dean at the University of St. Thomas School of Law in 2012, I grew increasingly aware of the new market realities that challenge students, lawyers, and law schools. While law students and lawyers still must develop to become highly competent legal technicians, they must equally develop all the competencies that today's clients need and want. Each law student and lawyer needs to realize that he or she is essentially the owner/entrepreneur for a service business, providing the broad range of competencies that clients demand.

To support students in meeting these market challenges, I decided to spend the summer of 2013 with a team of research assistants to create materials and teaching engagements to help each University of St. Thomas Law School student to create and implement a plan for employment which the student could use throughout all three years of law school. This book is the result of that collaboration. I want to express deep appreciation to the team of eight research assistants who worked with me this summer: Madeline Coulter, Katherine Jirik, Peter Leslie, Patrick Lucke, Carl J. L. Numrich, Sarah Schaefer, Colin Seaborg, and Bryan M. Wachter. All contributed suggestions at weekly meetings and provided final edits. I want to give particular thanks both to the student co-authors of many of the chapters who are listed in the Table of Contents and to the team leaders, Carl J. L. Numrich, Bryan M. Wachter, and Katherine Jirik. I greatly appreciate also chapter authors Lisa Brabbit, Kendra Brodin, Greg Stephens, Judith Rush, and especially Tom Holloran who has been faithfully supportive throughout the whole project. I am grateful for the support of the University of St. Thomas School of Law in this project and for Greg Sisk, my colleague who teaches the other section of Professional Responsibility, for his willingness to require his section also to participate in this Roadmap for Employment initiative. Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Uve, who helped by reading and commenting on many drafts, and who was tirelessly supportive of a summer spent helping the students connect the dots to be successful in their search for employment.

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D. Dedication and Responsiveness to Clients²⁹³

1. Client Service

Dedication and responsiveness to clients are extremely important. Clients have many options and competition for them is fierce. Clients tend to assume that you provide an excellent work product. Therefore, often it is client service that determines whether you obtain and retain business.

Successful attorneys know that relationships are the key to being successful. Clients want to do business with people who they know, like, and trust. Successful attorneys are the ones who not only possess the requisite legal skills, but also know how to connect and stay connected with clients by providing them with the superior service to help make the clients successful.

2. A New Mindset

Successful attorneys are the ones who have developed a new mindset that keeps the focus on the client instead of on them. They have developed the habit of taking a *sincere* interest in the client. These attorneys' words and actions consistently demonstrate that it is really all about the clients and not what they can get from the clients. Their sole focus is to help and serve their clients. Consequently, they continually ask clients and prospective clients three questions: What are your needs, wants, and expectations? Is there anything that I can do for you? Is there anything that I can do to make your life easier?

3. Needs, Wants, and Expectations

Each client is unique with specific needs, wants, and expectations. Talk with your client, and listen to her. You need to understand their business and what is important to her. Ask her questions. Discover and understand her specific needs, wants, and expectations. For example, you may discover that one client wants you to try every case to a conclusion while another client wants you to settle the case as soon as possible. You may discover that one client does not care how you staff a file while another client wants you to use only one partner and one associate on the file.

But there are some needs, wants, and expectations that all clients have. Clients want a consistent, superior work-product that is timely, clear, and decisive. Clients want to work with an attorney who is focused on them and their success. Also, clients want to work with an attorney who is committed to excellence in everything that he or she does. And clients want an attorney who is accessible, attentive, caring, ethical, friendly, likeable, sincere, and trustworthy.

4. Treat Professors as Your Client

Unless she has received prior sales training, how can a student learn and apply the critical skills of dedication and responsiveness to a client? We tell our young associates to practice their client-service skills on senior attorneys by treating them as their client.

Just like clients who are unique, each senior attorney is unique with different needs, wants, and expectations. Our associates must discover the differences among the senior attorneys

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and provide them with exceptional service according to their individual needs, wants, and expectations. In addition to learning how to serve the senior attorneys according to their individual needs, wants, and expectations, our associates must also provide what all clients expect: a superior work product that is timely, clear, and decisive. Good client-service makes clients look good and good client-service makes clients' lives easier, so our associates focus on helping the senior attorney look good and helping make their life easier.

While you are in law school, you have a golden opportunity to practice client-service skills on your professors by treating them the same way that you would treat a client. Over the years, I have reviewed important client-service principles with our attorneys. In the November 2012 issue of *Law Practice Today*, the ABA published my article entitled "How to Obtain and Retain Clients."²⁹⁴ I recommend that you read my article and then conduct your own research on client service. Make a list of the principles and skills and start applying them to your professors. You can start by learning all that you can about your professors. What is their background? What articles and books have they published? What are they working on now? What are their personal interests? What are their favorite sports or activities? What are their likes and dislikes? What are their unique needs, wants, and expectations?

What are some principles of client service that you can start using to treat your professor as your client? Maybe you read an article that you think your professor would enjoy reading. Email it to him or her. This is a great habit to continue using with your clients and potential clients. Maybe you discovered that one of your professors is writing an article and needs help checking his or her footnotes. Volunteer to help. Remember, you are not trying to be a "brown noser or the teacher's pet." You are merely practicing client-service principles, one of which is to help others without expecting anything in return.

Because I want you to think about what principles make up good client service and how you can apply them to your new client, I am going to give you only a few insights. First, you need to develop a new mindset. You need to focus on your professors. Even though they are here to help you learn, they are not here to serve you. On the contrary, good client-service dictates that you are here to serve them. I am sure that you remember what President John F. Kennedy once said, "My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."²⁹⁵ Similarly, ask not what your professor can do for you, ask what you can do for your professor. Second, start asking yourself questions such as how can I help my professor? How can I make his or her life easier? Third, you need to become committed to excellence in everything that you do. And just as you would do for any client, you can start by being committed to always providing a timely, superior work-product.

5. Keep a Journal or Portfolio

When applying for a job, you have many ways to distinguish yourself. One way to distinguish yourself is to mention in your resume or cover letter that during law school, you gained experience applying client-service principles. And one way that you gained the experience was by treating professors as your clients. In fact, your experience with client service may be the one thing that piques the curiosity of a hiring partner and triggers an interview. In

²⁹⁴Greg Stephens, *How to Obtain and Retain Clients*, *LAW PRACTICE TODAY* (Nov. 2012), http://www.americanbar.org/publications/law_practice_today_home/law_practice_today_archive/november12/how-to-obtain-and-retain-clients.html

²⁹⁵ President John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address (Jan. 20, 1961).

order to provide examples and to tell a compelling story at the interview, you need to keep a journal of your client-service activities.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ Experiences of client-service, like all experiences with competencies, should be kept in a portfolio. See the chapter “Building a Portfolio: Advantageous, Not Overwhelming” for further discussion of this habit.