

Beginning the Job Search Process

The process of looking for a job is primarily a search for information: about yourself, about career areas, and about a specific job market. You have probably already drafted at least one resume, and/or a cover letter. The following is an organized approach to the task of information discovery.

Keep in mind that these areas are just outlined suggestions. It is helpful to go through them to supplement the career search efforts that you have already made.

History

Prepare a personal history. List your historical events on a piece of paper; you'll want to refer to it when preparing a resume or preparing for an interview. List your educational background, leisure and volunteer activities, hobbies, work histories and social histories for yourself, and your accomplishments.

Skills

Recognize your skills. Skills can be either transferable or substantive. Transferable skills are those based on your aptitudes or acquired through learning: research and writing abilities, organization, leadership, and public speaking. Substantive skills are those which rely on your expertise in a particular subject matter: bankruptcy, tax, or accounting.

How do you determine what skills you possess? Look at your accomplishments. What have you achieved that has given you a sense of personal satisfaction? Which achievements are most important to you?

Ask yourself which personal and professional skills you would like to use and develop. Which skills do you wish to de-emphasize? You may be a superb waiter, and have no desire whatsoever to incorporate that skill into the rest of your life. Think of the skills you use during leisure or volunteer activities; is there a way to incorporate those skills into your professional life? If you are a member of Toastmasters because of your love of public speaking, be on the lookout for a job that would use that skill.

Rewards

How do you define success? Again, if your concept of success is reducible simply to dollars, think again. To put it another way, what kind of life do you want? Does your idea of success include working independently, leading others, making policy, being treated with respect, or exercising authority? Think of the people in your life whom you respect and admire. What is it about their lives which you would emulate?

What intrinsic and extrinsic rewards do you expect from your work? Money is only one of the rewards of work. If you can think of no reason for becoming a lawyer other than financial success, read *Alumni/ae In Action*, a book about public interest lawyers.

What other rewards are important to you? Respect, status, challenge, opportunity to be creative, ability to change the existing social/political order, the opportunity to serve?

Life Priorities/Constraints

Some options are closed to us. Be thankful that this is so. Choices must always be made, and it's difficult to grow and succeed while keeping all of one's options open. Not everyone is capable of being a public defender; not everyone wants to be an entry level associate in a big law firm. Some of the constraints are external: your low grades could make it unlikely that a large firm will be interested in interviewing you. Some are more personal choices: your passion for snow skiing makes a Miami location undesirable.

Passions

What is intrinsically fascinating to you? What are you drawn to? What makes you lose track of time? To the extent that you can incorporate your passions into your work, you will find increased joy and satisfaction in your life.

In pursuing your passions, consider your fantasies about life. If your daydreams include helping the oppressed, working on Capitol Hill, or being a leader in your community, determine what is necessary to achieve those goals. Consider the contributions you would like to make to society and to the legal profession.

Michael Josephson, chairman of the Josephson Institute of Ethics, asks people to consider how they would like to be remembered when they die. If you would hope that people would praise your service to the community, leadership, commitment to social justice, or your commitment to your family, consider the kind of job that will enable you to accomplish those goals.

Work Environment

Work does not exist in a vacuum. You will work in a particular type of organizational climate. More than just geography ("Dallas"), the "where" of work will include what kind of people you work with, the culture of the organization for which you work, the office building (size and layout), city/rural/suburban setting, and the area of the country.

Consider your previous jobs. How did the "where" aspect affect your job satisfaction and success? Do you work best in a relaxed work culture, reflected in casual dress styles, informal chains of command, open door policies and collegial work projects? Do you prefer more structure and formality in the work environment? If you find the environment

uncomfortable, it will be difficult for you to fit in, to succeed, and to be satisfied with your work.

The Perfect Job

Why bother to talk about the perfect job? It doesn't exist, and if it did, someone else would probably get it. So why engage in this exercise? Simply this: If you can't define your "ideal" position, you have nothing with which to compare real opportunities, and no way of making an accurate assessment of how well the real job suits your abilities and desires.

Make a list of the attributes your ideal job would have. Include all details: work hours, atmosphere (casual, formal), type of office and building, location (city, state, rural, urban, suburban, home), colleagues (age, education, working style, ethics), substantive work required, opportunities for advancement, access to others in firm/corporation/community-
-list everything which in the past or in your dreams has made you love (or hate) your job.

Keep this list handy. Compare each and every job opportunity to the perfect job. Know where you are willing to compromise, delay gratification, trade-off certain items for others, and where you cannot yield.

An Aside About Grades

You will be tempted to believe that nothing else about you matters except your grades in law school. Although grades are important, since they are the only objective standard by which employers can compare the relative merits of law students, grades are not the only factor employers consider in making employment decisions.

At a recent National Association for Law Placement conference, hiring partners identified personal characteristics that indicate an applicant's potential success as a lawyer:

- good communicator
- initiative
- charisma
- self-motivated/self-starter
- team player/consensus builder
- enthusiasm
- intelligence
- ambition
- integrity/strength of character
- hard-working
- sincerity
- humble assertiveness
- common sense

- problem-solving skills
- ability to work under pressure
- creativity
- confidence
- good personality
- ability to think on one's feet and "shoot from the hip"
- ability to relate to diverse individuals

When you are not in the top third of the class, you will have to distinguish yourself from the pack in other ways: activities, honors, entrepreneurial endeavors, achievements, personal triumphs--anything which separates you from others.

Deciding

As you gather advice and information from others, don't be surprised if some of the advice conflicts. There is rarely, if ever, only one correct way to do things. You are the ultimate expert on your career. Listen to others, but decide for yourself.

What can you do with a law degree?

In addition to traditional jobs for lawyers (which would include private practice, corporate legal departments in business and industry, government positions, judicial clerkships, judgeships, military, public interest organizations and academia), lawyers engage in an ever-increasing number of non-traditional occupations. Lawyers engage in restaurant ownership, real estate development, hotel/inn ownership, nightclub and theater management, publishing, and act as agents for entertainers, writers, artists and athletes.

Never presume that a career is closed to you simply because it does not require a law degree. If non-traditional careers interest you, check the OPCD for various publications devoted to the topic.