

Buchalter

HOW TO SUCCEED AS AN ASSOCIATE IN BIGLAW

NEW MEDIA LEGAL

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How to Succeed as an Associate in BigLaw

- First impressions are everything
- Everyone you'll be working with was a new lawyer once.*

* *Some people remember that better than others.*

How to Succeed as an Associate in BigLaw

- Prepare in advance
 - Learn the names and backgrounds of the people for whom you expect primarily to work for.
 - Learn who the important clients are.
 - Search for affinities, common experiences, common goals.
- Be lovely to all staff, regardless of perceived rank. They can bury you.
- Word travels fast.
- Observe firm culture, protocols. Associates have little to gain from being perceived as eccentric.
- Learn and honor firm values.

How to Succeed as an Associate in BigLaw

- Make sure you have clarity on assignments, including the amount of time expected.
 - Carry a yellow pad everywhere.
 - A quick, post-meeting email confirmation to the assigning attorney, repeating your understanding of the scope of the assignment, is helpful.

How to Succeed as an Associate in BigLaw

- Be certain to know deadlines, and honor them.
 - “Perfectly good excuses” for not meeting a deadline are not desired.
 - Do your own backup calendaring
 - Do not blame staff for mistakes. Just own them. “I have no excuse. I will try to make sure it never happens again.”

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- Working with Word Processing - Communication is Key
 - Be realistic with deadlines
 - Always proofread all emails before hitting send
 - Always exit the document you are asking to be worked on, especially when it is a rush
 - Always provide very specific and clear instructions which would include a c/m # and where to save it
 - The most popular request is a redline and when asking you always need to indicate which is the original and which is the modified!

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- Don't be "too big for your britches." Better to be liked and trusted, than to be perceived as a jerk who's a genius.
- Respect the culture. If you find you cannot, find another place to work.
- Many of your fellow associates will be around you a long time. Partners, clients, referral sources.

How to Succeed as an Associate in BigLaw

- Study the work of the more senior lawyers with whom you are working.
 - Use Imanage or whatever document system the firm uses.
 - Documents authored by the assigning lawyer usually are your best sources.
 - More recent documents are best.
 - When you draft for someone, try to learn and use their “voice.” It can vary sometimes obviously, sometimes subtly.
 - Save added humor, sarcasm, vitriol for the most senior lawyer on the team to insert.

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- Be “matter oriented,” not “task oriented.”
 - Think about not just what you are asked to do, but what else might be helpful.
 - Manage the calendar, keep track of the strategy.
 - Show that you care – not just about the matter, but about the client relationship. Believe it or not, there is no “client fairy,” and any client relationship is the result of a great deal of effort.
- Believe it or not, it’s harder to be a partner. Know this.

How to Succeed as an Associate in BigLaw

- Be aware of, and try hard not to commit, “sentinel events.” (Sentinel events are things that never, ever should happen.) Examples:
 - Lying. Example, forged signature.
 - Threatening anyone.
 - Using Firm stationary for personal business disputes.
 - Suing a client.
 - Not running things through conflicts checks before commencing work.
 - Third party subpoenas
 - Being tricked into conflicting out the law firm.
 - Covering up your mistakes rather than quickly and fully reporting them.

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- Avoiding Sentinel Events (cont'd)

- Harsh social media postings that can be traced to you and worse yet, the firm.
- Membership in, or donations to, controversial causes.
 - Donor lists – public records/requests – clients and others put pressure on the firm. (Same-sex marriage example).
- Use of research tools for improper purposes. (Really, same thing with any firm property).
- Expensing stupid things, or extravagant things.
 - Example – the 1st class airfare associate.
- Openly using a client's competitor's products or services.
 - Nestle candy on counters when Mars is major client and in the offices
 - Sending documents to client FedEx via UPS

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- Take requests for self-evaluative memos and similar things seriously. They are your chance to justify your existence both a compensation/promotion time, and in general, to people who may not otherwise know you.
- Ask for feedback, in a polite and informal way.

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- Its never too early to make plans for the future.
 - Professional development / memberships / image creation
 - Client development
 - Recommendation: Right after the end of year, make a bullet-point list of what you hope to achieve for these things in the upcoming year.
 - And don't just write it and file it away – DO it. Keep near or on your desk.
- Try to build cross-practice friendships with peers in other practice groups.
- Build informal “mutual aid”-type relationships with peers.
- Mentorship is, at best, both natural (not forced), and mutually beneficial

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- Do time entries with descriptions that convey value.
 - Example: “work on case.”
 - Know whether the client has specific billing expectations / requirements, and learn them, in order to prevent client annoyance and partner angst over needless write-downs.
 - Not every partner bills in the same way. Both confidence, and styles, vary dramatically.
 - Example: writing down your time.

How to Succeed as an Associate in BigLaw

- Be a willing participant in firm activities, even when they are bothersome, non-billable, or often both.
- Establish your own value, your own identity.
- Build your brand.
- This is your time to truly define yourself... Use it.