

Tyson & Mendes' Young Professionals: Tips for Standing Out as a Young Attorney

Emily Berman, Esq.

One common challenge facing young attorneys today is how to distinguish themselves in the workplace and the legal community amongst a constantly growing crowd. California already ranks near the top of all states in terms of the highest numbers of active attorneys per capita, and the numbers are only growing with each passing year.¹ The State Bar of California is currently considering lowering the minimal passing score for the bar exam², which could significantly boost the pass rate and only add to the growing number of new attorneys entering the field in the years to come³ Many firms are hiring more rapidly than in the recent years past, making it more important than ever for new attorneys to focus on differentiating themselves from

the pack.⁴ In light of the fierce competition, what can new attorneys do to make a name for themselves and stand out from the crowd? Read below for some insightful tips from some seasoned practitioners in the field, based on commonly shared experiences.

Take Ownership/Initiative

Associates who take ownership of an assignment from the get-go will always stand out. This means understanding how the project at hand fits into the big picture of the case. When you ask questions about the longer-term strategies the partners have in mind, you will likely end up with a better work product. Even if the assigning attorney does not have time to explain or give you more information than what you need to know to complete the one task, they will generally appreciate the fact that you asked and that you took ownership of the project. Often times, ownership of a project does not end with one assignment. The research you conduct turns into the basis of a motion that you later are the one to argue, the meet and confer letter you draft leads to discovery responses you use in bigger projects, the examples are endless. In many instances, you

can get on top of these things before the assigning attorney has to ask you to do so. Taking the initiative from the beginning sets the best young attorneys apart from the rest.

Understand Your Own Limitations

While just about all attorneys are over-achievers to some extent, the pressure is especially intensified for new attorneys to say yes to every single assignment, task, request, or favor that is asked of them. A generous, can-do attitude is generally appreciated, and everyone wants to be seen as the go-to, reliable associate that rises about the rest. But nothing is more important than knowing when you physically cannot complete something that has been asked of you within the required time-frame, and speaking up honestly about this. The failure to do so sets you up to disappoint your supervising attorneys and overwhelm yourself at best, and opens the door for blown deadlines and serious consequences in your cases (not to mention a firing offense and/or malpractice). Failing to communicate may seriously harm your client's interest. While the situation in which you suddenly

¹ <https://lawschooltuitionbubble.wordpress.com/original-research-updated/lawyers-per-capita-by-state/>

² <http://www.calbar.ca.gov/About-Us/News-Events/California-Bar->

Journal/Articles/ArtMID/10568/ArticleID/371/Evaluating-the-cut-score-for-the-California-Bar-Exam

³ <http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2017/0>

7/31/decline-lawyers-passing-california-bar-exam-score/

⁴ <http://abovethelaw.com/2017/05/the-state-of-the-job-market/>

have too much on your plate cannot always be avoided, there are ways to try to prevent and manage it.

Open communication is key. For every single task that is asked of you, ask the assigning attorney for a completion deadline. This may seem futile in many occasions, as very often the response is “as soon as possible” or “as soon as you can get it done.” But because calendars are always changing, it is essential to speak up about what else is on your plate. Often times supervising attorneys do not communicate with each other and may have no idea how much you are handling for someone else.

Treat Everyone with Professionalism

It seems only logical that younger associates should show deference to partners and more senior associates, but this concept is not obvious to everyone. Deference should be shown in both good times and bad, and respect and gratitude should be extended to both those who out-rank you and those who work under your direction. Do not assume you can disregard something an assigning attorney asks of you just because you are close to them in terms of “class rank.” Do not assume you can complain or vent to someone just because they *are* of the same “rank.” And do not forget deference and professionalism are more important than ever when

things go wrong. When mistakes are made, deadlines are missed, or clients are angry, it is your responsibility to step up to the plate.

Keep Perspective

Remember to practice gratitude. Each day, treat your job as a privilege (that can be taken away at any time). Inevitably, there will be times the grind gets the best of you and you may question why you ever went to law school in the first place. But remember that the opportunity to practice law is something you are lucky to have. When you exhibit this attitude in every toward every task you are given and toward every interaction you have with a coworker, client, or opposing counsel, you will stand out from the others and be the person with whom everyone wants to work.

Good Resources for Young Attorneys:

- SDCBA Forum for Emerging Lawyers⁵
- ABA Young Lawyers Division⁶
- California Young Lawyers Association⁷

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Berman specializes in in the areas of personal injury, general liability, and civil litigation. Contact Emily at 858.459.4400 or eberman@tysonmendes.com.

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<https://www.sdcb.org/index.cfm?pg=ForumforEmergingLawyers>

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https://www.americanbar.org/groups/young_lawyers.html

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<http://www.calbar.ca.gov/Attorneys/Sectors/CYLA>