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How Can You Stand Out From the Crowded Applicant Field?

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You have successfully survived your first year of law school. You've spent countless hours reading case law, researching and writing your first brief, typing and memorizing outlines, and furiously typing as you regurgitate as much information as you can muster on your final exams.

Or maybe you are in the midst of a clerkship, or have just completed one. You have spent time researching, writing and attending hearings and other proceedings.

Either way, you have expended tremendous time and effort in developing and honing legal skills that will serve you going forward. Now comes the challenging part: standing out above everyone else so that you can land the job you want.

Whether your goal is getting a large-firm job through on-campus interviews, public interest work, or a job in the private sector, a lot will depend on how you present through your resume and interviews.

All law students and recent graduates are intelligent, work hard, and have unique perspectives or skill sets to add to the legal community. Unfortunately, you often have only one page and a 15-to-20-minute window to set yourself apart from the numerous other candidates vying for the same positions. In light of the never-ending challenges presented by looking for a job in this legal market, this article proposes a tailored approach to applying for the job you want.

Do you have a great work ethic? Are you a great writer? Do you have relevant prior work experience? Do you have a passion for helping those in need? Do you have a unique experience that stands out? Do you have connections? Do you interview well?

Many people have some combination of those characteristics or experiences to offer, yet most of us are not able to offer everything.

So the question is: What do you bring to the table? Highlighting your strengths so that you stand out from the crowd can be integral in getting the job you have had your eyes on for six months or six years. To properly achieve this end, self-awareness is a very important trait. Talking to professors, classmates, colleagues, friends and family can assist greatly in figuring out how to best present yourself.

Applying for Big Law Jobs

If your goal is to obtain a large law firm job—whether as a summer associate through on-campus interviews, after a clerkship, or by some other means—it is important to understand what those firms are looking for in candidates.

Sure, most big firms want people with really good grades who are willing to undertake the challenge of long hours and stressful environments. However, there are many people who possess sterling grades and a strong work ethic.

But why are you different from the rest of the potential applicants?

While the mass application process has its benefits, consider finding a few firms that really fit what you are looking for. For example, imagine you have an interest in intellectual property work. Lots of firms have IP practice groups, but different firms handle vastly different types of matters.

An important initial tool can be a firm's website. Many firm websites include the clients that given practice groups handle, and the websites of the individual attorneys in those practice groups give specific information about their representative experience. By doing a little extra legwork, you have found the intellectual property firms that do the kind of work you are interested in. But that little extra bit of work is only the start. An interviewer can tell when all you have done is research the firm's website.

Instead, your next step should be to make a connection with someone at that firm. Research recent articles or use firm website biographies to find one or two people with whom you have something in common. The same law school is an easy connection for most, but, especially if you are applying within the geographic area where you attend law school, there are going to be a number of people who went to the same law school. Instead, maybe you went to the same undergraduate school; maybe you clerked for the same judge; maybe you grew up in the same or nearby towns; maybe that person's pro bono or extracurricular activities align with your interests.

Whatever the connection is, use that connection to get your name on the firm's radar. Don't be shy about sending an introductory email to introduce yourself, express your interest in the firm, and inquire whether the person would be willing to give you a few minutes of his or her time.

Another way of making a connection is by attending events that will also be attended by an attorney from a firm you are interested in. Many of these events—seminars, panel discussions and the like—have receptions afterward that provide access to participants and attendees. Again, don't be shy about introducing yourself and expressing your interest in the firm.

Whether the conversation happens on the phone, at an event or over a cup of coffee, it can only benefit you to show such initiative so early in the recruiting process.

Reaching out and showing your interest in a firm can have multiple positive effects. First, many attorneys who are contacted by an interested candidate will pass that information on to the hiring coordinator, hiring committee members and others. Then, when the firm is going through the numerous applications to determine who they would like to interview, your resume will have

name recognition. Associated with that name recognition will be genuine interest on your part. Showing initiative and genuine interest may get you one of the finite number of interview spots over someone who did not take that same approach.

Now, at least in part because of your efforts, you have an interview. Having made the connection with a firm attorney already, you immediately have a common point of reference with the person conducting the interview. While it is probably not the best approach to force it, you can opportunistically mention your connection. For example, one of the most common interview questions is, "Why are you interested in this firm?" In addition to the common reasons like practice groups, firm reputation and location, you can say "I spoke with [name of attorney] about the firm and that conversation has made me even more interested in your firm."

Another connection that can set you apart in an interview is with an attorney familiar with, but not actually associated with, the firm for which you are a candidate. Seek out an attorney in the community—whether it is an attorney you know or one your law school put you in touch with—and speak with that attorney about the firm with which you are interviewing. This will both allow you to confirm the reputation of the firm and provide yet another reason during your interview that you are interested in the firm.

Applying for Public Interest/Government Jobs

Many law students and recent graduates have a passion for causes and issues that fall outside of the realm that one normally thinks about in the law. While litigation and corporate work dominate most conversations, government and public interest law employ tons of law students and recent graduates each year. Public interest law encompasses things like charities, nonprofit organizations, educational and public international organizations and clinics, while the government has positions such as prosecutors, solicitors and public defenders.

Each of these areas of the public sector requires different interests, commitments, experiences and skill sets in order to achieve their goals.

Similar to interest in a large-firm job, making connections with people already established in the government or public interest can be integral in standing out from the rest of the crowd. Public interest groups desire candidates who are interested and passionate in the cause the group represents, often to a greater extent than law firms. They also value familiarity. Demonstrating an interest and a passion is key to setting yourself apart.

Unlike big law firms that have individual biographies on their websites, most areas of government and public interest law may only provide a description of the type of work they do without providing information on who does the work or the background of those doing the work. Nonetheless, there are ways to make connections and show interest.

Many public interest law and government professionals belong to organizations or volunteer their time to causes that match the area of public interest law in which they practice. For example, someone who works in education may also be a member of a local school board or may give their time to some of the many events that schools host. As a law student or recent graduate, attending school board meetings and volunteering in school events will provide access to

professionals already working in educational law while simultaneously demonstrating a genuine interest.

In addition, you can volunteer your time with the interest group itself.

When it comes time to apply for a job with the government or a public interest group, you will have shown that you are passionate and engaged in that given area. If you have taken the steps to volunteer with the public interest group, you will have become familiar with the group and made them familiar with you. These actions can only help you stand out from the likely large numbers of other candidates applying for the same position.

Whatever area of law you wish to pursue a career in—be it a large law firm, the government, a nonprofit organization or any other area of law—standing out from the crowd is not easy. Dozens, hundreds or even thousands may apply for the same position that you are seeking. Many of those applicants, however, are simply applying to apply for a job. By making connections with professionals and demonstrating genuine interest in a position, you give yourself a greater opportunity to be considered than someone who is merely a name on a resume.

It is no secret that finding a job in this legal market is difficult. Take the steps to stand out from the crowd and give yourself a leg up on your competition.

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Read more: <http://www.thelegalintelligencer.com/id=1202723616565/How-Can-You-Stand-Out-From-the-Crowded-Applicant-Field#ixzz3XTmGn3JO>

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