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Ten tips for summer associates: How to make the most of your time

During my long tenure at DLA Piper, I have been heavily involved in the firm's recruiting efforts. For five years, I served as the Chicago office's hiring partner and very recently took on the role of national hiring partner-associate recruiting. Hiring is one of my passions, and there are few things as rewarding as watching recruits grow, flourish and be promoted at the firm.

Recruiting is key in preparing any organization for the future and is part of the legacy that the current generation leaves behind. Summer internships for law students are an important part of the recruiting strategy for many organizations. I have planned and led many of these programs over the years and have had the opportunity to watch many young lawyers succeed during the summer, while others have struggled.

There are a number of valuable takeaways from these experiences which I would like to share in the hope that this summer's class will benefit from the lessons learned by others along the way.

1. View the summer as one long interview. One of the biggest mistakes that summer associates make is believing they have locked in a permanent offer once they land their summer job. However, many firms hire more summer associates than they will ultimately need as full-time lawyers, so their summer program is actually a competition for spots.

Moreover, even if you are at a firm where there is space for everyone who is hired into the summer program, if you fall short of expectations you may not get an offer. Therefore, it is imperative that you conduct yourself professionally and do your best at all times.

2. Take the work seriously. Summer programs are designed to give students a sense of what it is like to be a junior associate at the firm. It is a mix of work and social activities.

Depending on the firm, it can

seem like a full-time job just to keep up with all the fun. Remember that you need to do a great job on all of your assignments and make sure that you are completing a sufficient number of assignments of the type needed to fully demonstrate and evaluate your capabilities.

3. Get to know your fellow summer associates. We are in a relationship-driven business. You should make sure you develop strong ties with your fellow summer associates. If all goes well and you receive an offer, you will be working alongside them after graduation. They can be a great source of often-needed peer guidance and support, particularly during the more challenging times in your practice.

4. Get to know the firm's attorneys and staff. The bedrock of every law firm is its people. Just as it is important for you to get to know your fellow summer associates, it is equally imperative to develop relationships with the firm's attorneys and staff. They will be invaluable in helping you learn about how to succeed and get things done. You need to have allies who are invested in your success.

5. Observe the golden rule. It sounds so simple, but it can prove challenging. Demonstrating respect for others is the cornerstone to showing that you have the requisite emotional intelligence to fit within the fabric of the firm. You must do more than just prove that you can do the work — you need to show that you are collaborative, collegial and able to get along with others.

PARADIGM SHIFT



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6. Learn to juggle. Multitasking is a part of everyday life, especially as a lawyer. Summer programs are designed to force participants to develop and hone their time management skills and to demonstrate that they can effectively juggle all the different

responsibilities that come with being a successful associate. Be careful about saying "no" to any of the various work and social activities presented to you during the summer.

7. Find your people. Being a summer associate can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially as you are starting out and trying to get to know everyone. Be sure to set aside time every day to walk

the halls, and find individuals with whom you meaningfully connect and focus on developing those relationships. It is often by meeting people organically that the best mentoring happens.

8. Actively seek out feedback. The best summer programs are designed to provide frequent, comprehensive and honest feedback. Beyond whatever formal tools there may be, take the opportunity to speak directly with your assigning attorneys and those who are running the program to hear their comments firsthand and take their suggestions to heart. The information they provide will be helpful and you will be seen as engaged and proactive about your career.

9. Learn from your mistakes. We all make mistakes, and no one is perfect. What is important is that we learn from them. When something does not go as planned, you should take a step back, figure out what happened and how to do it better the next time, and then be sure to adjust your approach accordingly.

10. Is this the right place for me? Many firms have a rigorous interview process before deciding on who to hire into their summer programs. The hope is that by the end of the summer, the summer associates' performance has in large part validated these choices.

That being said, it sometimes becomes clear over the course of the summer that certain people may not be a good long-term fit. These decisions should be a two-way street, meaning that both firms and summer associates need to exercise sound judgment during the course of the summer in determining whether the relationship is going to work.

It is better to make that evaluation before certain career-changing decisions are made.

I hope these tips are helpful to you as you progress on your professional journey this summer, and I wish you the best of luck in finding a job that is a true fit for you.

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