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Insights

POINTERS FOR A PANDEMIC: A SUMMER ASSOCIATE'S GUIDE TO SUCCESS

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As Biglaw summer associate programs begin across the country, you may find yourself wondering how to be a successful summer associate during this global pandemic. Law firms across the country have shortened, canceled, or otherwise restructured their summer associate programs in response to Covid-19. While the summer may not be what you anticipated when you accepted your offer, being a summer associate is still arguably one of the best parts of law school. The following article provides practical advice for how to thrive as a summer associate despite the pandemic.

1. Setting Up An Effective Workspace

Working remotely has never been easier. Virtually all you need is a laptop and cell phone. However, setting up a designated work space at home may allow you to be more productive and be able to separate work and home life. In a perfect world you would have a home office with an electric standing desk, noise canceling headphones, printer, scanner, landline, and a desktop computer with dual monitors. In reality, many law students live in smaller spaces, have roommates, or are currently living with family. Try to find a quiet, well-lit location where you have a strong Wi-Fi signal, multiple outlets, and privacy. Ask your firm whether any equipment or office supplies are available for your use. If you don't have a desktop computer, consider requesting or buying an external mouse and/or ergonomic keyboard for your laptop. You can invest in noise canceling headphones or simply use earplugs. Natural light and a plant can spruce up even the most modest workspace.

2. Social Media

Be mindful about what you post on social media. Make sure that selfie doesn't accidentally capture the confidential client information on your laptop screen or in the brief on your desk. Even if your profile is private, don't post anything you would not want your employer or colleagues to see.

3. Home-Life Balance

If you live with a roommate or family members, divide tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and ordering groceries online or grocery shopping. Meal prep over the weekend to make the week easier.

Schedule packages to arrive on the same day or only certain days of the week so you are not constantly dealing with disinfecting or segregating boxes.

If you are caring for a child, family member, or pet, take turns accepting responsibility for them and communicate with your partner or family regarding scheduled conference calls, video calls, and upcoming deadlines. A shared calendar, whether online or hanging on the wall, can help you keep track.

Try to schedule medical appointments for first thing in the morning so you are available the rest of the day; at the end of the day so you are available most of the day; or on a day when you do not have an assignment due. Communicate with the attorneys you are working with ahead of time so they know you will be unavailable and give them your cell phone number in case they need to reach you.

4. Mentors

Mentors are great resources for the summer and beyond. Many summer programs assign one or more mentors to each summer associate. Take advantage of the opportunity to ask your mentors questions about the law firm, his/her practice area, and for career development opportunities. Your mentors may also provide advice for how to work with a particular partner more effectively or offer feedback on your work product. In addition to your assigned mentors, you should seek out additional mentors. For example, one mentor may help make introductions to other partners you want to work with or offer insight regarding what law school classes to take. If you are a member of a particular affinity group and there are no other attorneys in your office that belong to that group, log on to the firm's internal directory and reach out to members of that group even if they are located in other offices.

5. Watch and Learn

Ask your mentors, the attorneys you work with, and the work coordinators if there are any opportunities for you to remotely observe upcoming trials, court hearings, mediations, arbitrations, depositions, or strategy meetings. Ask whether you can listen in on conference calls with a client or opposing counsel. Find out whether there are any presentations or panel discussions you can attend virtually. Even done remotely, these are invaluable learning experiences.

6. Maintain Professionalism

Even though most people are working from home, it is still important to maintain professionalism and remember that you are working for a law firm. Do not be overly casual in your emails or during conference calls. Dress professionally for video conferences and be mindful of your backdrop. Depending on your firm and the office culture, professional attire during a pandemic likely means business casual. However, if you are observing an official proceeding you should wear a suit. We

get it; most people are not getting haircuts or manicures right now, but do your best to look presentable.

7. Be Social

An important aspect of the summer program is having fun and building meaningful connections with the attorneys to find out whether you are a good fit with the firm. Social distancing doesn't have to change that. Get creative! Ask an attorney to join you for lunch or coffee over Zoom. Does an attorney have a baby or puppy? Schedule a time to chat over the phone while each of you takes a walk with your little one or fur baby outside. Does an attorney like to bake? Swap recipes or bake something together over FaceTime. Are you listening to a great audiobook or binging a show on Netflix? Did you try a new at-home workout? Did your roommate accidentally chop off too much of your hair? Talk about it! Use these funny Covid-moments as ice breakers.

Connect with the other summer associates in your class. They are your people. Organize Zoom calls. Start a text chain. Bounce ideas off each other; ask each other questions; or just vent. The summer is an incredible bonding experience and, assuming you all join the firm after graduation, you will need that camaraderie to thrive as a junior associate.

Don't forget to reach out to your friends from law school who are at other law firms. They, more than anyone, will understand what you're going through.

8. Self-Care

Self-care is more important now than ever. Whether you recharge by meditating or watching reality TV; make sure you carve out time for yourself every single day. Eating healthy meals, staying active, and getting enough sleep cannot be overstated. Check-in with yourself and give yourself plenty of grace. We are experiencing unprecedented times and it is normal to feel anxious or overwhelmed. There are resources available to you such as virtual therapists and law school counselors.

9. Be Flexible and Responsive

Most attorneys are working remotely and many are forced to juggle childcare, homeschooling, and other family responsibilities while faced with economic uncertainty and the fluctuating needs of clients. Be flexible and understand that an attorney may need to reschedule a conference call with you or may not be able to chat as long as you may want to. It is also important to be responsive. The last thing any attorney needs right now is to chase down a summer associate in search of a late assignment or wonder whether you will ever return his/her call or email.

10. Be A Resource

You will hopefully be given substantive assignments rather than busy work. An attorney and client are counting on you for excellent work product. Be helpful. Be thorough. Ask questions when an

assignment is given to you if you don't understand. Find out upfront when something is due and do not miss deadlines. Ask what format the attorney would like to receive the final product and follow directions. Cite-check and spell check your final product. Do not cite a case that you didn't read. Attach highlighted copies of the authority that you cite. Check in if questions arise during your research. As you read the caselaw, flag any issues you encounter that the assigning attorney may not have considered. If you are drafting a pleading, read the local rules, judge's standing order, and applicable emergency orders to ensure you are complying with any unique requirements.

11. Proofread, Proofread, Proofread

You may find it best to proofread your work product in hardcopy. It may be easier to spot mistakes on the page rather than rereading the same text on your screen. However, before you print anything, ask your supervisor about the firm's policy for printing and disposing of documents. If you are not allowed to print, cannot properly dispose of documents, or do not have a printer at home, try to take a break from your assignment and proofread it with fresh eyes later that day or the next day. If it is an urgent assignment and you cannot read it later, consider changing the font size and color. Changing the text will give your eyes a different perspective and help you spot typos or mistakes.

12. Don't Take It Personally

Ask for feedback. Accept constructive criticism and incorporate it into your next assignment.

13. Time Entries

You will quickly learn this is the bane of every Biglaw attorney's existence. As annoying as it is, timely and accurate time entries are important because they are how the firm - and you - get paid. Get into the habit of keeping track of your hours, releasing your time every day, and being as accurate as possible. Ask the assigning attorney if the particular client you are working for has any specific requirements such as no block-billing.

14. Be Appreciative

Many law firms cut the salaries of the attorneys and staff you are working with. Appreciate the fact that people are trying to juggle their hectic work schedules, childcare, homeschooling, and other family responsibilities, while also serving as a mentor to you, giving you assignments, and providing feedback. Be grateful that you have a summer associate position, you're being paid to learn, and you have an opportunity to be offered a job after graduation. Be kind, grateful, and humble. It will not go unnoticed.

15. Use Your Time Wisely

Explore various practice areas. Work with as many different attorneys as you can. Express an interest in a particular practice area if you have one. And don't forget to have fun!

MEET THE TEAM

Linda C. Hsu

Los Angeles

linda.hsu@bclplaw.com
+1 310 576 2192

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