INTRODUCTION

This book provides practical information and specific advice about how to obtain a position at a top law firm of any size, including AmLaw 100 firms,\(^1\) and how to excel once you are there. The advice is given in the form of a step-by-step explanation of a highly effective and proven method used to secure a top law firm job,\(^2\) and detailed best practices to follow to be a star associate on the fast track to partnership and a successful junior partner.

This book is recommended for anyone considering law school and for law students at every level of their law school careers: during law school and the summer after law school. First-year law students (1Ls), for example, may find it useful as they scramble for their summer jobs. Concurrently, upper-level students may find it useful in tailoring their permanent job searches.

This book is also recommended for medium and large law firm associates at all levels. For instance, first-year associates may find it useful as they seek to make a strong first impression on senior associates and partners. At the same time, mid-level associates may find it useful for providing guidance regarding their transition from junior associate.

Although this book focuses on law, the steps for securing a top job and succeeding once there could also be helpful in other fields. The principles in this book can be used by people interested in working in any environment where the competition is tough and the jobs are limited, including in

---

1. The term *AmLaw 100 firm* refers to one of the top 100 law firms in the country by gross revenues. *American Lawyer* magazine surveys these firms every year, and its AmLaw 100 survey is well known and respected. As part of its survey, *American Lawyer* also ranks these 100 firms by various profit indicators, including profits per partner and revenue per lawyer.

2. Note that if the goal is to work at a top law firm, the focus in law school should still be on earning top grades and trying to secure a position through the traditional fall interviewing program. Accordingly, the guidance provided here should be seen as a supplement to this traditional approach, and there is no guarantee that a top law firm job will be obtained using the alternative approaches presented. Moreover, not everyone will be comfortable pursuing a law firm job in the manner discussed.
Given the current law market and the considerable expense of law school, it may be worthwhile to spend some time thinking about whether you plan to practice as a lawyer after law school. If the answer is no, it may still make sense to go (after weighing the cost, including the opportunity cost) because learning how to reason like a lawyer seems to be a helpful skill for any profession, as evidenced by the many successful JDs in areas outside the law (and the various books that provide information about different careers possible for JDs). If the answer is yes and the plan (at least for now) is specifically to practice at a top firm, there are two schools of thought about how your choice of law school can best help you achieve this goal.

First, it is widely recognized that having a degree and excellent grades from a top-20 law school places you in the best possible position to secure a top law firm position. Short of that preferred path, the question is whether to attend a highly ranked law school or go to a less prestigious law school and have a better shot at being at the top of the class. The conventional wisdom has been to go to the most highly ranked law school possible. This notion has been challenged recently by two law school professors, who suggest that performance in law school is more important than law school “eliteness.” Thus, in their view, you can increase your top law firm prospects by doing well at a lower ranked school versus being in the middle of the pack of a higher ranked school. Richard Sander & Jane Bambauer, The Secret of My Success: How Status, Eliteness, and School Performance Shape Legal Careers, 9 Journal of Empirical Legal Studies 4, 893–930 (2012). Both sides have merit and should be evaluated. To help break the impasse (and consistent with the advice provided here), consider attending the law school that potentially can benefit you most in terms of exposing you to the area(s) of law in which you may want to practice (understanding and assuming the risk that your original preferences may change). To determine the school best matched to your preferences, weigh your responses to these forward-thinking questions: Is the law school known for the specialty you are thinking about? Does the school offer many courses in that specialty? Is there an option to obtain a certificate in that specialty? Is there a professor at the law school who is nationally recognized in that area? Does the law school offer a clinic or other opportunity to practice that area of law during school for credit? Is the school in a location where there are lots of
employment opportunities for your specialty (i.e., Washington, D.C., for a regulatory niche such as tax or securities law)? A majority of yes answers to these questions indicates that the law school is a strong match to your current preferences, and the exposure the school provides you to your specialty should prove helpful for securing a position at a top law firm.

This book demonstrates what may be possible for those willing to invest the extensive effort and time to complete the steps discussed herein and for those who will not be deterred by constant rejection. I was inspired to write this book and help others after being turned down by hundreds of firms, including two rejections from the law firm that ended up hiring me and eventually admitting me as partner.

This information should be extremely helpful at various times in your law career, especially for readers who come from a family that does not have a law background or experience getting into and working at a top firm. First, it will help you to have this information early in law school so that as law students, you can follow the steps of GPS: Get good grades early, Pick a major, and Specialize (by gaining academic and work experience in a niche area) as soon as practically possible. Next, this advice will be valuable when trying to get a job. Law students can learn how to take a DIP (and get into a top law firm) as they Distinguish themselves, Interview with people who care, and Practice persistence. Once onboard at the firm, associates will find the book advantageous as a reference for best practices such as how to determine partner preferences and satisfy them, be rigorous, and manage workload effectively to ensure success as a junior and mid-level associate. This advice will come in handy especially at those crucial times in your associate career when you may have the option to switch firms and prove yourself all over again. It will also be useful to consult as a senior associate on the road to partner, so that you are prepared to learn the business of practicing law and are in the best possible position to make partner when first eligible. Finally, the guidance, if followed, will help ensure a smooth transition from star associate to successful junior partner as you manage current clients effectively, network strategically, seek referrals, and continue to build your brand.

This book also comes at an important time. Data show that the legal job market has still not recovered from the 2008 recession. For example, only 56 percent of 2012 law graduates were employed in permanent full-time
jobs requiring a law degree within nine months of graduation (the standard measuring period).\(^3\) The overall 2012 employment rate after nine months was higher: it was 84.7 percent, according to data gathered by the National Association of Law Placement, but even that figure was the lowest since 1994.\(^4\)

Accordingly, many current law students are worried with good reason about the prospect of securing a top law firm job during this currently down job market. Similarly, many law graduates at top law firms are anxious about keeping their jobs, much less making partner. Thus advice about securing an offer from a top law firm and excelling once there is sorely needed. Rigorous application of the advice provided in this book should greatly improve the chances of securing an offer from a top law firm and excelling once you are there. Job offers may be more competitive than in years past, but they are still out there, especially for people who are determined and willing to apply the effort necessary to make it happen.

This book is organized in six easy-to-read chapters, starting chronologically with law school and concluding with life as a junior partner at a top law firm. Chapter 1 discusses how to succeed in law school. Chapter 2 discusses how to determine whether to pursue a position at a top law firm. Chapter 3 discusses how to secure a top law firm position. Chapter 4 discusses how to succeed as an associate at a top law firm. Chapter 5 discusses how to make partner at a top law firm. Chapter 6 discusses how to succeed as a junior partner at a top law firm.

The material that follows should be able to be read quickly. The most important takeaway points (TAPs) are listed at the beginning of each chapter, followed by detailed suggestions for applying the TAPs. The six TAPs are as follows: (1) To succeed in law school, follow the GPS: Get good grades early, Pick a law major, and Specialize. (2) To help determine whether to pursue a top law firm position, ask yourself if you are comfortable being a salesman. (3) To get into a top law firm, take a DIP: Distinguish yourself, Interview with people who care, and Practice persistence. (4) To become a top-performing associate, follow these soft skill practices: determine and

---


satisfy partner preferences, be rigorous, manage workload effectively, seek specific feedback and take action, make others look good, document performance results annually, have a partner’s mind-set, and secure an effective sponsor. (5) To become a partner, stay productive, be active inside and outside the firm, serve in firm leadership roles, demonstrate that you care about the business of practicing law, become an expert, consider secondment opportunities, and make your case. (6) To succeed as a junior partner, manage current clients effectively, network strategically, seek referrals, take the long view, and continue to build your brand and distinguish yourself.

I hope the information provided in this book is helpful in your pursuit of a position at a top law firm and along your road to partner.

Good luck!