A. Introduction¹

What do you say when a potential employer says to you, “Tell me about a project that you have managed and what you learned from that experience; tell me specifically about how you handled a difficult team member in implementing the project?”² If you are like most law students, the slightest mention of “project management” or “difficult team member” makes you cringe, evoking painful memories of free-riding classmates. Once your discomfort passes, you either struggle to come up with a meaningful answer or fail to think of an experience demonstrating your project management and teamwork competencies. Would it surprise you to know that was supposed to be an easy question? What happens when you get a tricky question, such as, “What value do you bring beyond just technical legal skills to help our clients be successful?”³

The Roadmap process transforms this type of challenging question into an opportunity to differentiate yourself from other students. You will not need to wait for a specific question about the value you bring beyond technical legal skills to help legal employers and clients. Instead, you will understand what skills legal employers and clients need and will be able to explain how your strongest skills can help them succeed. You will be prepared with your best stories to demonstrate persuasive evidence of your strongest skills.

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¹ Authored by Neil W. Hamilton and Carl J. L. Numrich.
² E-mail from Thomas E. Holloran, Senior Distinguished Fellow, The Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership in the Professions, former General Counsel and President, Medtronic Corp., to author (Dec. 17, 2014, 14:45 CST) (on file with author).
³ E-mail from Dennis Monroe, Founder of Monroe, Moxness, Berg PA and former CEO of Parasole Restaurants, to author (Dec. 17, 2014, 11:58 CST) (on file with author).
Every law student desires meaningful employment to serve others well upon graduation from law school. The challenging legal job market does not necessarily mean legal employers are not hiring; in fact, the proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) for legal services is holding steady, but legal employers (and clients) are emphasizing additional experience and skills to add value for the clients.

In this new legal economy, law students will secure meaningful employment by differentiating themselves from other law students. The problem is “virtually all [law students] lack the skills to differentiate themselves.” Therefore to become employable and to develop professionally, most law students need help determining how they can develop and present a unique package of capabilities and skills that appeal to legal employers and clients.

The most effective way for you as a law student to gain meaningful, long-term, JD-required or JD-preferred employment is to: (1) understand your own strengths and motivating interests; (2) understand the competencies desired by clients and legal employers; (3) discern how your strengths and motivating interests best meet the competencies that clients and employers want; (4) design your time in law school (and early years in practice) with the goal of developing those competencies; and (5) effectively communicate and demonstrate evidence of those competencies to potential employers.

To better enable law students to do this, some law schools are becoming more deliberate about helping each student develop and implement a plan for meaningful employment to serve others well. With the help of a comprehensive, curriculum-based employment-planning program, you can be more prepared, more persuasive, and more competitive when entering the legal employment market.

Although there are a number of available resources, including your law school’s career services office, you can successfully attain meaningful employment by committing yourself to the Roadmap steps, approaching them with purpose and total honesty, completing the self-assessments, and actively seeking feedback from others throughout the process. The following sections explain why you should buy into the Roadmap process.

During your three years in law school and throughout your entire career, the Roadmap process can empower you to take charge in telling the story of how you add value beyond just technical legal skills to help employers and clients.

B. How to Use the Roadmap

The Roadmap will take you through the following steps to develop the skill you will need to obtain meaningful employment so that you can serve others well:

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Assessment of Yourself

1. What are your strengths?
2. What are the characteristics of past work/service experience where you have found the most meaning and positive energy? Is there a particular group of people you have served from whom you have drawn the most positive energy in helping? What specific strengths and competencies were you using in this work or service?
3. To what degree have you taken ownership over your own continuous proactive professional development? Have you made the step from a student’s passive mindset where you do what professors ask to proactive ownership to develop the competencies legal employers want?
4. Looking at the competencies that clients and legal employers want, how do you self-assess what your strongest competencies are? How do others who know your past work/service assess your strongest competencies?
5. How do your strengths from question 1, your motivating interests from question 2, and your strongest competencies from question 4 match up with the competencies that legal employers and clients want?

Assessment of Your Most Promising Options for Employment

6. Can you create a tentative list of the most promising options for employment where you see the best match among your strengths, the characteristics of past work that have given you the most positive energy, and the competencies that legal employers want?
7. What is your value proposition to demonstrate to those employers that you can add value beyond the standard technical legal skills to help the employers’ clients and the employers themselves to be more successful?
8. Step back and think creatively about the changing legal market and possible entrepreneurial responses to those changes. Could you demonstrate a particular strength that you have (or even a specific innovative idea) to help potential employers and clients be more successful in this changing legal market?

Your Professional Development Plan

9. How do you plan to use your remaining time in law school to gain good experiences that will assist you in attaining your most promising options for meaningful employment so that you can confirm, eliminate, or add to the list of your most promising employment options? What metrics will you create to assess whether you are implementing your plan?
10. How do you plan to use your remaining time in law school, including the curriculum and all the other out-of-the-classroom experiences, most effectively to develop competencies supporting your value proposition?
11. What evidence are you collecting to demonstrate to potential employers your growth to the next stage of development at your strongest competencies? What evidence do you want to develop going forward?

12. How do you plan to develop long-term relationships based on trust with other lawyers, particularly senior lawyers and judges, who can give feedback on your employment plan and help you with experiences to implement it? Are you assessing your progress in implementing this plan?

13. What is the biggest fear or roadblock holding you back from any of the previous steps?

**Persuasive Communication**

14. How will you most effectively communicate your value to potential employers on your list of most promising employment options?

Your work experience is an important factor to consider in the Roadmap process. There are three main categories that you may fall into:

1. Students with Modest Work Experience Who Do Not Yet Have Postgraduation Employment

Many “traditional” law school students attend law school immediately after completing college and thereby have modest employment experience. Similarly, other students who have an extended period of time out of the workforce from common life occurrences, such as raising children or taking care of family members, may also identify most with this category. You will want to use the time you have left in law school most effectively to develop your skills toward meaningful employment to serve others well, but you do not have enough experience to know what type of employment will best fit your strengths and interests. The key is to start now. Use the Roadmap to make your best judgment regarding your motivating interests, your strongest competencies, and the types of legal employment that might be the best “fit” for you and offer the most promising employment options. From there you should seek experiences that will help you develop your strongest competencies and confirm, eliminate, or add employment options. Veteran lawyers can most effectively help you if your message is, “I have a plan for employment with these top-priority strengths and options that I am exploring, and I am looking for experience to build these strengths and explore these options. If you are willing, I would love your input on my plan.” Notice that you are focusing your message on wanting experience with certain transferable skills and competencies as discussed in parts C and D of this section rather than just on wanting experience in identified practice areas.
like litigation. With this strategy, you are also sending the message to senior lawyers that you are at a later stage of development of the key competencies employers want, including initiative, drive, and commitment to professional development.

2. Students with Substantial Work Experience Who Do Not Yet Have Postgraduation Employment

While you may initially be resistant to a project that seems less applicable to your situation because you have done some earlier self-assessment, you should note that the Roadmap benefits you by (1) sharpening your focus in your employment search, (2) demonstrating professional career planning and giving you concrete evidence of later-stage development of the competencies of initiative and commitment to professional development, (3) helping you craft a clear value proposition and an “elevator speech,” (4) packaging your experience for a specific legal market, and (5) getting input from veteran lawyers.

1. **Sharpening your focus**: You probably came to law school with a well-thought calculus of the job you want upon graduation. Even if you know what area of law you want to practice, the Roadmap helps to focus your research on that area and identify specific competencies useful to legal employers in your field. This research—and your creation of a powerful narrative around your strengths and experiences that add value to your targeted employer—is vital for effective messaging.

2. **Demonstrating professional career planning**: You know you have competencies and skills that have value in the marketplace. You also recognize that because you are more experienced than many other students, you may not have the extra ten years to learn from mistakes after graduation. You want to leverage your experience with your new legal education to land the most meaningful employment. You need to identify the competencies that you already possess, develop those competencies and bolster them with legal experiences, create concrete evidence of the later-stage development of your competencies, and identify specific steps that you can take right now to achieve your career goals.

3. **Helping you craft a value proposition and an elevator speech**: While less experienced students may be working to build more career experience to develop a sixty-second elevator speech, students with substantial work experience must learn to skillfully condense past experiences, future career goals, and competencies while crafting their elevator speech. You must also answer the “elephant in the room” question: why law school/a legal career now? Why didn’t you stay in your previous career?

4. **Packaging your experience for the legal market**: You may know generally about your skills, experiences, and accomplishments, but the Roadmap
can help you to better articulate that information in language that will resonate most with legal employers.

5. *Getting input from veteran lawyers*: While you may have experience, it is important to understand what the veteran members of the legal profession are looking for and how they react to your experience, your goals, and your plan for employment.

### 3. Students Who Already Have Postgraduation Employment

The Roadmap is not simply about finding employment; it is a career-advancement tool to further develop the specific competencies that your employer, mentors, and coaches want you to develop. Seek feedback on your Roadmap from your employer.

You should use the Roadmap to demonstrate to your employer your initiative and commitment to professional development toward excellence. You should take the opportunity to give your Roadmap to mentors and coaches at your future employment, ask for feedback from them, and then discuss the feedback with them. In section II.D, you will find instructions to access a Roadmap template specifically tailored for students who already have postgraduation employment.

### C. Foundational Realities for Every Law Student to Understand

#### 1. Changing Markets for Legal Services

Do you believe that you are entering a changing market for legal services? Your answer to this question, as explained further in this section, must be an unequivocal “Yes.” This foundational reality can contribute to anxiety and loss of confidence if you focus on, “How in the world will I learn both the basic knowledge and skills needed to pass the bar and satisfy employers and also acquire the knowledge and skills required in changing markets?”

To respond to the challenge of changing markets for legal services, a better and more productive question for a law student is, “How do I signal to potential employers and clients that I am trying to transform market changes into opportunities by committing myself to continuous professional development over a career?” Researchers, policy makers, and managers overwhelmingly agree about the need for each worker in a rapidly changing market to take ownership over continuous development of new knowledge and skills that meet employers’ (and clients’) needs.

A law student should signal that he or she is embracing change through proactive ownership of professional development that meets both employers’ and clients’ needs in changing markets. Creating, implementing, and continuously