

INTRODUCTION

This is not a rule book. There are plenty of those. This book is a success training guide. Use it as a power tool to help you prepare to pass any bar exam in the nation. Use this book to master techniques to assist in achieving most every academic or professional goal to which you set your mind.

IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

If you are in law school, whether you are just starting or about to finish, this book is *written for you and to you*—as a conversation with a supportive mentor. Think of me as your personal trainer at the academic gym. I will show you what works and what doesn't. I will guide and share advice, stories, self-assessments, and planning tools. And, like any good trainer, I will push you hard to do your very best and to get stronger with every workout.

Together, we will discuss professional, study, and life skills—strategies to help with bar prep and beyond. What you do *and how you think* will help get you through today's challenges and will pay success dividends for decades to come. As you experience positive results from your hard work, you will want to take on new challenges. I hope this book inspires and propels you toward a lifelong cycle of success!

The text and tips apply to all law students. Some comments address those who are struggling. Do not skip them even if you are doing exceptionally well. If you are at the top of your class, you may not *need* this book. You are likely already doing much of what is suggested. But you will *want* this book to provide reassurance and help you stay on track for continued success.

Most law students *do* need to take deliberate, affirmative steps to ensure bar passage. The sooner you know what to do and how to do it, the sooner you understand the rules of this game, the easier it will be to create and implement a success plan.

In addition to serving law students well, this book will also help:

- **Families, friends, spouses, and partners of law students:** Law students and bar takers may seem so stressed out that you hardly recognize them. You may be offended at their “disappearing” into their studies. “How hard can it be?” you wonder. “Isn't the bar exam just another test?” Law school is *very* hard, and the

bar is *not* just another test. This book will help you understand why the bar exam is so different, and so difficult, and it will help you learn how to lend a hand, or back off, as needed. As a key player in the life of someone taking the bar exam, your support is critical. So, thank you for helping the law student in your life to succeed.

- **Practicing lawyers taking the bar exam in another jurisdiction:** You may think because you passed one bar exam and have been practicing law that passing another bar should be easy. You may believe you do not need to prepare as thoroughly as other applicants. Wrong. You need to set aside your practical knowledge, forget for a moment that you are a lawyer, get back into the mindset of a student, and follow the exam advice and strategies in this book.
- **Law professors and administrators:** This book will help you assist your students and improve your school's bar pass rates. (Faculty and deans, feel free to contact the author for further information, teaching materials, or assistance.)
- **Prospective law students:** This book will help balance any negatives you may hear about legal education and see that despite the great challenges, enormous rewards await. I loved law school, and I hope this book helps you decide to go to law school. Read it now to establish good habits from day one. Read it again after you have finished your first year to stay on the road to bar exam and professional success.
- **Experienced attorneys who work with new lawyers:** This book will help you understand concerns facing law students today in order to become stronger mentors and more effectively integrate new lawyers into law practice.
- **Students working to achieve any academic goal, from high school to graduate school:** Much of the stress and many of the challenges described here in this book are not unique to law or the bar exam. As you read, replace the words "pass the bar exam" with do well on finals or midterms, get a high score on a standardized test such as the scholastic achievement test (SAT) or law school admissions test (LSAT), or complete most any professional training program. You will find success strategies to help you achieve your goals and celebrate your accomplishments.

YOU CAN PASS THE BAR EXAM! YOUR FATE IS NOT SEALED BY THE LSAT, FIRST YEAR GRADES, OR ANY OTHER SINGLE INDICATOR

The LSAT (or GRE) *alone* does not accurately predict whether you will pass the bar exam after law school. The LSAT is not designed to predict bar passage, and it can be destructive to think it does. First-year (1L) grades are a better predictor of bar success, but even the person with the lowest graduating GPA (grade point average) in your law school class *can* pass the bar exam. It is not your grades but what you learn from, *and what you do with*, the information that grades can provide that matter most.

Too many students act like bar passage is predetermined by performance in one or another law school course. No way. Not true. The only door that is likely to close because of low first-year grades is a summer clerkship with an elite law firm. No matter what your 1L grades, unless you were academically dismissed after 1L, you *can* improve enough to pass the bar exam after graduation—if you do the work and are committed to success. And, again, no matter what your graduating law school GPA is, if you graduate, you *can* almost certainly pass the bar exam. Do not ever resign yourself to bar failure.

Calvin, a third-year (3L) student whose LGPA (law school grade point average) put him in the bottom third of his class, came into my office the first week in March, and said, “Professor Berman, I know that based on my numbers, my LSAT, GPA, and my being a first-generation black male, my chances of passing the bar are not high. Don’t sugar coat it. Can I pass this July or not? I want to know now.” I looked at Calvin (not his real name), and stated without hesitation, “Yes, you can. I know that because you are here in my office now, in March, not June, and because you are here asking this question. That means you can pass, *if* you do exactly what I say.” I went on to tell him to read this book cover to cover, follow the strategies, and meet with me regularly until graduation, and then do his bar review work that summer as thoroughly as humanly possible. I told him he had to throw himself in, full force, from that day forward, continuing in high gear until the last “time” was called. Calvin passed his first bar exam that same July. So can you.

Whatever your admissions test scores and undergrad or law school grades, don’t get discouraged. Rather than throwing in the towel, throw yourself into a growth mindset.

What do I mean by *growth mindset* and how does it compare to the opposite, a *fixed mindset*? With a growth mindset, you are determined that your abilities *can* develop and improve.¹ Let’s look at some examples:

A fixed mindset would say, “I did poorly in 1L, so I’m no good at law school.” Or, “I got a bad grade in contracts, so I’m never going to understand contracts.” By contrast, a growth mindset says, “I’m going to figure out what I didn’t understand and what I can do differently so that my grades improve.” A growth mindset says, “I will have a second opportunity to be tested in contracts on the bar exam, so I’m going to

use bar review and other opportunities, such as taking remedies in 3L and attending every academic support or success program (ASP) workshop, to learn what I didn't *get* the first time I studied this material."

Empirical studies prove that adopting a growth mindset helps you stay strong, own your power, and pass the bar exam.²

If your grades place you anywhere below where you would like to be (as a loose guide, look for strategies to improve if your grades place you in the bottom half of your law school class), or if you find yourself struggling with academic, financial, psychological, or physical challenges in law school, be brave enough to confront the situation.

Part of the process is realizing you are not alone. Find a mentor and reliable assistance, such as from your ASP faculty or a favorite professor. Diagnose why you received certain grades, learn how to improve, and put an action plan into place to make concrete improvements. Use 2L and 3L (and 4L if you are a part-time student) as opportunities to make changes to ensure first-time bar passage.

Another of my students, I'll call her Alice, someone I counseled throughout law school and helped to turn low 1L grades around by 3L (and pass her first bar exam), actually used her track record of improvement when interviewing with law firms. She did not shy away from discussing her low 1L GPA; instead, she powerfully persuaded the senior partner to hire her precisely because of her resilience, grit, and ability to learn from mistakes. The law firm saw her struggle and her overcoming adversity as evidence that she would fight for their clients with the same energy and commitment she demonstrated in law school.

I know you don't want to appear "stupid," "weak," or somehow "other" and not "belonging" by telling someone about your struggles. You hope that the challenges will just go away, that next year will be better, and that no one will have to know. I so get it. But you are better served by action than wishful thinking. Know and tell yourself loudly that there is nothing wrong with *you*. The key is realizing what you need to *do* differently. Getting quality, reliable help to guide you is key. Sometimes, we know how to improve, but most often we need guidance to see how to make effective changes.

And, often, especially in law school and bar preparation, small changes can make big differences. You might need to sleep more, listen differently, and read material two or three times. You might need to exercise more to relieve stress. You might need glasses or contact lenses. You might need to talk with a counselor. You might need some financial advice to get a handle on how you will repay your student loans so that money worries don't keep you from studying. You might need to review your notes right after each class and outline each week rather than waiting until the end of the semester. And, you might need to learn how to take notes that are helpful to you. You might need to take practice exams and study sample answers, especially if you have professors who don't give midterms. And, in classes where you do have midterms, you might benefit greatly from meeting with the professor to ask how you could have improved on your exam.

The key is to find what works for *you*. Once you know what to do, it may not be that difficult. I often tell students, “You are like a square peg trying to fit into a square hole. You are just tilted slightly diagonally. Make a few changes and you’ll slide right in to where you need to be.”

Next, get help—either in the form of books on law school success or from someone smart and supportive, or both. Reading wise advice may bring just the “ah ha moment” you need to see how law school differs from undergrad and adjust your own studying accordingly. As to books, look in the bibliography at the end of this book or consult your ASP faculty or law librarian. As to people, notice I said *someone* smart and supportive. Justice Sotomayor in her autobiography, a must read for every law student, particularly first-generation students, tells how she approached the smartest girl in her class for advice when she wanted to improve in grade school.³

All you need is one person to show you where you need to improve. I am not suggesting you broadcast your concerns to the entire law school. I am, however, urging you to go to your ASP or legal writing faculty, the Dean of Students, or any helpful professor. You can try talking with someone in career services or a faculty advisor for a student group you belong to or are thinking about joining. If the first person you approach is not someone you click with, try again.

The point is, because law school grades *do* correlate with bar passage, you want to use your law school experience to learn how to make any necessary adjustments *before the bar exam*. So, do not delay. Tackle your concerns head-on. The longer you wait, the more you will suffer. Break through the pride, fear, shame, or whatever may be holding you back. Get on the path to success today.

And I assure you, you are not the only one with challenges. But you are the one who will most benefit if you seek and find effective help.

WHY DID I WRITE THIS BOOK?

With little encouragement, most lawyers will vividly recall and happily tell you their bar exam horror stories. Many describe the exam as a “hazing ritual.” Some still have bar-related nightmares. But studying for the bar exam does not have to be “torture.” You can choose to view it that way and be miserable for several months. You can even let it get to you so much that you never figure out how to pass and pay the price for years.⁴ Or you can view the bar exam as an opportunity not only to learn many legal rules but to master certain critical lawyering skills and embrace strategies that will help you achieve professional success. At the end of the day, you might even look back on the whole thing as a positive experience!

Don’t believe me? I get it. But I have helped thousands of people pass bar exams nationwide, and I know that training for this exam can be an empowering experience. I can help you too. And the habits that get you through this experience successfully will help you succeed at other endeavors later on.

Bottom line: passing the bar exam is something you must do to become a licensed attorney, so why not look at its bright sides and at least let in the possibility that the process may teach you indispensable life lessons—including the benefits of struggle and finding ways to thrive in the face of challenge. Embracing bar success can become an incomparably powerful turning point, one that will guide you to a lifetime of success.

I thus wrote the first edition of this book to share practical advice for the bar (and life generally)—strategies I have developed over decades of work on the front lines in legal education (and life!). I wrote the second edition to update the first—particularly in light of the recent adoption of the UBE by many jurisdictions. During the course of writing this second edition, I was delighted to stumble on a great deal of research findings that confirm much of what this book offers readers about the power and potential of adopting and holding fast to a positive mindset. This should reassure those of you who need data and science to support findings before you accept them.

LOOK AT FACT PATTERNS AS PUZZLES, CHALLENGING AND FUN!

The teaching moment I most look forward to is about ten days before the bar exam when, inevitably, a student sheepishly inquires, “Is it really *weird* that some of these questions are getting . . . fun?” With a huge smile I reply, “Not weird at all. It means you are on target.”

They are really not fun until you get to where your knowledge and skills are strong enough that you have the tools to puzzle through them. Think about how *not fun* it would be to do a crossword puzzle in a language you don’t understand.

I hope that by the time of your exam, you will have worked hard enough to declare with conviction, “*Bring it on! Throw any fact pattern at me, on any bar subject. I can break it apart and say something intelligent about the issues. I may not remember every detail of every rule, but the examiners are not expecting me to. The exam is a pass/fail, minimal-competency test. I am not writing an amicus brief for the Supreme Court. In the real world, I will almost always be able to look things up. (Most of the time, I will be required to look things up!) On the exam, I will be relying on what I do know because of the dedicated time and effort I’ve put into studying, and because of the reasoning skills I have developed. I will carefully read the facts they give me, think logically, and explain my reasoning in a straightforward manner. I can do this. I am ready to prove myself.*”

Beyond the “hazing ritual” critique, many view bar exams as useless wastes of time and money. I will not dispute that the process is costly, but your effort and investment can serve numerous important purposes for you—far beyond the examiners’ stated purpose of consumer protection.⁵

- The bar exam can be empowering. If you prepare the way you should, you will develop more skills and possess more knowledge than ever before. Picture the powerful athlete who has trained for the Olympic Games and is poised to run or swim when the starting gun sounds. That will be *you* when you are told you may break the seal, open your booklets, and begin the exam. Visualize yourself as strong and smart, ready to logically approach any fact pattern the examiners might throw at you.
- Bar preparation can bring clarity. Studying for the bar provides an opportunity to review what was covered during law school, as well as to learn material that wasn’t taught. You spent endless hours focusing on minutiae, concentrating on the veins in the leaves on the branches of trees—or thousands of disparate legal rules—sometimes without ever seeing the forest. During intensive bar studies, you are given the opportunity to pull it all together. You will see connections and parallels in different subjects that previously had no link in your mind. Imagine a photo that is out of focus finally becoming clear. Law school blurs information, sometimes intentionally, to prepare you to handle the gray areas in people’s lives. Bar review simplifies and clarifies. It boils things down to straightforward rules. Once you have completed the training process, you will just read the facts carefully, apply rules you have mastered, and draw upon reason to reach logical conclusions. Bar review lecturers do not “hide the ball” the way law professors do. You can enjoy a short respite from the mystification before things again become real-world murky.
- The bar exam can sharpen your ability to reason. Ideally, you will be applying the rules you have learned (and memorized, by the time of the exam) to hundreds if not thousands of different fact patterns. You will not be delving as deeply into the complexities and subtleties of law as you did when studying appellate cases in school, but you will be reasoning through a far greater volume of factual scenarios that extend into many different areas of law. Your brain will become a power tool. Once you know your stuff, you can go into the exam looking forward to analyzing new fact patterns. They will become fascinating puzzles that you have the ability to solve. Train well and your mental muscles will welcome the challenge.
- The bar exam levels the playing field. There is a hierarchy of prestige among law schools and class rank within particular schools.⁶ One objective of the bar exam is to certify that *every* passer, regardless of race, gender, or alma mater, possesses

the requisite minimal competency to practice law. In some ways, this opens access within the legal profession, particularly for graduates of schools that are not highly ranked, where graduates can honestly say, “I passed the same damn bar exam you did.” And, despite the criticism of bar exams as being a barrier to the profession, in at least this one aspect, they are an undeniable equalizer.

- Bar preparation can help you train your organizational, time-management, and concentration skills. Some people have these down, but most of us are still working on them. These and other so-called “soft skills” are tools that will help you pass the bar exam and excel in the profession. They are among the most important skills for new lawyers to possess according to recent studies.⁷ Our complex world has foisted great time-management demands on us all. Use law school and bar prep to enhance both your law skills and life skills.

CALENDARING

A 3L student asked to meet to go over an exam. I noted the time and date of our appointment, and, as he walked away without writing anything down, I asked if he would remember the meeting. He laughed and said he had never kept a calendar and so far he had done just fine. I told him he should start. He chuckled again and said, “I’ll be there; you’ll see.” He kept his appointment with me, but several months after the bar, he phoned to tell me that he had missed a meeting with colleagues at his new job. The partner indicated his displeasure and made clear that the new lawyer would have been fired had it been a client meeting. Only then did I hear, “You were right; I wish I got into the calendaring habit when you told me to in law school.”

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- Bar study gives you a reprieve from, and helps combat, life’s endless pressures to multitask and hop superficially from topic to topic. Developing a sufficient command of the law, so as to readily analyze numerous new fact patterns, demands significant mental engagement. While perhaps not as deep as the level of reflection required when called on in class or when writing a law review note, your thinking must be more like that exercised when analyzing a novel than when skimming social media. It is important, and it is good, to give yourself time for real reflection and learning. Too many of us are used to reading on and not stopping when something does not make sense, just hoping that “context clues” will help us understand what we really do not. Part of being a professional is having the integrity, curiosity, and persistence to figure things out, to drill down until

you truly understand whatever issue you are wrestling with, and to help others do the same.⁸

Again, I am not a blind supporter of bar exams. I agree with many calls to reform the licensing process. By all means, once you pass the bar, lobby for any changes you believe are needed. I will be right there with you. However, because bar exams are fixtures for the foreseeable future, I find it far more productive for those taking the exam to focus on their benefits and to work to pass the exam the first time around than to complain.

To legal educators I say, especially given student loan debt and employment challenges, let us offer more extensive and more creative energy, resources, and focus on helping students pass today's exams while at the same time we continue to reflect thoughtfully on licensure reform and the bar exam of tomorrow.⁹

Some of you will continue to fight me here. You just don't see anything positive about certain aspects of the exam, such as its closed-book nature. For example, some might say, "No one needs *memory* in the digital age. And, lawyers should not rely on memory anyway but should conduct research to confirm even points they think they know." Well, most of the time, that is true, and it's one of the reasons I love the performance test portion of the bar exam; the multistate performance test (MPT) does not force applicants to rely on memory but rather on just the sorts of skills they will need as beginning lawyers.

As a legal educator and author, I have worked and written for decades to improve legal education and the bar exam. If I were taking today's bar exam, however, I would not waste one minute being angry that I must memorize rules. Why? I can only control what is within my control. You too. You *will* walk into that exam with only your brainpower and a laptop or pen, with no access to outside resources. So, stop thinking about it until after you pass. Then argue for meaningful bar exam reform.

In the meantime, try to find some benefit to having to spend time training your memory. Look for the silver lining! For example, despite our smartphone culture, you will *not* always have ready access to needed information or the time to look things up "in the real world." (I hate that expression. There is nothing unreal about school or bar prep. It's all real, if you take it seriously.) If you have ever run out of battery on your phone, you know the value of having memorized phone numbers.

Two, you might find it freeing to step away, for even a short while, from our dependency on machines.

And, three, even when you can readily look something up, the human brain sometimes makes subtler and ultimately more useful connections than machines or the machine may not have all the data it needs. A scene from the James Bond movie *Skyfall* depicts a perhaps unlikely but interesting moment when human thinking trumps a computer's ability to search for information. The much-younger Q is working frantically to find the location of the villain. Although equipped with the most modern,

sophisticated software and programming savvy, Q does not obtain the answer from machines because they were not loaded with the requisite historical logistics data. The older Bond finds the answer and comes to the rescue by connecting the dots using his early memories of the now changed city and his reasoning capability.

Again, not arguing here against AI (artificial intelligence); I'm simply saying that when you have to do something (here, memorize a large quantity of material), make the best of it. Make the lemonade out of the lemons!¹⁰

HOW THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN AND HOW TO READ IT

This text is based on my decades of experience teaching in law schools and bar review, and on extensive research about academic and bar success. (All stories are real, although I have changed names and other details to protect privacy.)

It is best to begin reading this book while still in law school, the earlier the better. Even if you start the day before the bar exam, though, there is something for you—a passage or quote that will make you stronger and boost your confidence going in.

Most law student readers will start with Part I to plan for a successful first bar exam outcome and then read Part II on repeating the exam for a hefty dose of preventive medicine.

If you are a 2L or 3L student, feel free to skip any parts of the book specifically directed at 1Ls. Or, read through those portions and ask yourself what you have learned about how you learn best since that time. (We will talk a lot in this book about metacognition or learning about learning.)

If this is your first bar, do everything in your power to avoid the enormous burdens of having to retake the exam. (It is critical that after the exam you are able to honestly look at yourself in the mirror and know you did your very best. You never want to say, “coulda, woulda, shoulda.” And, you never want to treat the bar exam as a practice test and wing it.)

Readers who are repeating the bar exam might start with Part II for specifics on the unique repeater issues, then read all of Part I to guide you to success on your next exam.

TERMINOLOGY NOTES

Traditional and nontraditional students; first-generation and continuing-generation students. The term *traditional law student* in this book refers to those students who enter law school in their twenties, either just out of or soon after college. They may be working part time, but are generally not working full time. Law is typically their first career. The term *nontraditional student* refers to students who are either older or working full time or both. Nontraditional students may also have extensive family responsibilities,

caring for young children, aging parents, and sometimes both. Law will likely be a second or even third career for these students.

These terms have limited value and can be both over- and underinclusive. A twenty-five-year-old “traditional” law student may have a parent dying of cancer or other grueling family demands. And a forty-year-old “nontraditional” student may be financially stable, have grown children, and have a spouse or partner who takes care of nearly all of his or her needs. Neither group has it “easier.” Everyone struggles with something. And because of the costs associated with law school, most students are oppressed on some level by the weight of financial worry. Acknowledging their limited usefulness, the terms are still helpful to reveal common denominators with certain groups of students. I will highlight those. I will also occasionally provide notes to particular subsets of nontraditional students, such as those with young children. I do encourage all readers to review all passages, even those targeted to people in “different boats.” You might be surprised to find that your own challenges are similar, and that the advice helps.

Whether students are traditional or nontraditional, they are also either *first-generation* or *continuing-generation* students. These terms are commonly used to refer to college students; first-generation students are often the first in their family to attend college, and may not have access to the mentorship, advice, and networks (sometimes called *social capital*) that continuing-generation students may have. A similar divide is found in law schools. Most law students are continuing-generation students—in other words, they were not the first in their family to attend college (and in some cases, not the first in their family to attend law school). However, first-generation students now make up a sizeable proportion of law school classes, and that proportion is likely to increase—first-generation students already make up close to half of the undergraduate population in the United States.¹¹

The needs and experiences of first- and continuing-generation students are distinct, but they do overlap. When starting their law school careers, first-generation and continuing-generation students may both face “impostor syndrome,” and the (mistaken, but natural, understandable, and very common!) feeling that they don’t belong there. But first-generation students often lack access to role models and support networks that many continuing-generation students can draw upon.¹²

Even with professional role models, many people feel that they don’t *belong* in law school, for a host of reasons. If this is you, you are in good company—with almost everyone in your class who is honest. Susie, one of my students who came from a family of doctors, teachers, and other professionals, recounted trembling with fear in the first days of 1L because she felt so out of place. She was the first to go to law school and had never met a lawyer in her life. To her classmates who were first-generation college students, she was savvy, but Susie’s impostor syndrome was real to her.

Whether you are a first- or continuing-generation law student, you have successfully tackled many challenges to get to this point. And, Chapters 5 and 6 will help

you with specific strategies to get the help you need from family, friends, and faculty as you prepare for the bar exam.

July and February takers. This book sometimes refers to first-time bar exam takers as *July takers*. If you graduate in December or for another reason are taking a February bar as your first exam, just replace *June* with *January*, and *July* with *February*. Yours will be a winter rather than a summer timeline, but what you do during the months prior to your exam will largely be the same. (The bar exam is offered twice annually, and although there are myths about one exam being harder or easier than the other, they are just that: myths.)

1L, 2L, 3L, and 4L. The first year of law school is often referred to as *1L*, while *3L* and *4L* refer to the last year of law school: *3L* for students in a full-time program and *4L* for students in a part-time program. (This nomenclature was popularized by a wonderful Scott Turow novel.¹³)

Intensive bar review, early start, and bar planning. I use the phrase *intensive bar review* to refer to the two months prior to the bar exam when law students hibernate, do nothing but study (if at all possible), and, typically, prepare with the assistance of a commercial bar review course. *Early start* refers to the last semester of law school, before formal bar review courses begin. Early-start work may be done independently, in law school extracurricular programs or curricular bar support classes, or with a review course. Early start is essential for many students—especially nontraditional students who are working or have significant family obligations while studying for the bar, as well as traditional students who have struggled in law school. *Bar planning* refers to a range of actions, from gaining familiarity with the exam to researching and enrolling in a suitable bar review course. Bar planning ideally begins on day one of law school orientation. (You are engaging in bar planning by reading this book.)

STATISTICS AND PERCENTAGES

I occasionally refer to bar statistics, but *you* are not a statistic. I have taught students who have a 99 percent chance of passing, based on the most reliable indicators of bar passage, LGPA combined with LSAT scores.¹⁴ And, I have taught many others whose chances of passing are statistically much lower. Students who are nearly certain to pass often feel just as much anxiety as do those who are statistically much less likely to pass. But there is one critical difference. The nervousness of those more likely to pass is countered by a powerful growth mindset, the belief that they have what it takes to learn what they need to know in order to pass. However, bar applicants from ranks within schools that typically have lower pass rates may harbor deep concerns that they may not pass.

A primary mission of this book is to change attitudes along with study approaches—to give bar applicants, no matter your statistical chance of passing, the tools *and*

confidence to help you break free of fixed mindsets that tell you that you can't succeed. But let me be very clear: this book is *not* about bestowing false confidence or giving hollow pep talks. It is about the determined and grounded belief that if you work hard and sensibly, and remain doggedly motivated, you can trust that you will succeed.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW? AND HOW TO USE THIS BOOK TO YOUR BEST ADVANTAGE

If you are a 3L or 4L approaching law school graduation, success is nearly yours. You can practically taste it. The bar exam felt so far off in 1L. Now it's here. Intensive bar review usually begins the day after graduation, or as it's sometimes called, *commencement*. Calling "graduation" *commencement* may have seemed like a strange term after high school or college; after all, you were celebrating being *done* with a particular phase of your education. But, the term fits well here because often the day after law school, you commence bar review. For that reason, expect law school graduation to be anticlimactic. Prepare your family and friends that while you are taking a break to celebrate, you are not done.

And, if you are burned out, find a way to recharge your batteries because you will need to be in the highest gear you have ever been in to give June and July your all.

TAKE OFF TIME IF NECESSARY TO GEAR UP FOR BAR REVIEW

A student e-mailed me about a week into intensive bar prep: "I hate bar review. I am fried. I cannot seem to get back any of the energy I had even last year." We talked. I urged her to take a day off, clear her head, and return ready: "The bar is the last lap in the legal education marathon. Picture Olympic runners—how tired and wiped out they look. Yet their jaws are somehow set, their steely determination far stronger than their fatigue. The sweat drips, and you know they are aching as they move toward the finish line. Then pure elation when they break through that ribbon! This is your last lap. Of course you're tired. You have every right to be. Take a short break. Change your scenery for a day or even a weekend. Or take a mental break to binge-watch mindlessly for a few hours, with lots of popcorn. Do whatever you need to get back into high gear with the energy to finish the race. You did not start this three or four years ago in order to give up now. You owe it to yourself to cross that finish line. So, step away from the stress for a moment. Get off the rat wheel. Rest and recharge. Then get back up, ready to run!"

If you are just beginning 3L or 4L, get a head start. Use the tools in this book, and take practice exams. If your school does not have a mandatory bar success course, take advantage of any optional or extracurricular bar-prep programs. Starting early will help you lay the groundwork to get the most out of bar review and significantly increase your chances of passing the bar exam the first time around. Getting an early start in bar review is essential; think of it as you would shopping before meal prep, or painting a base coat before adding layers of color.

If you are still in 1L or 2L, reading this book now is great as part of early bar prep! It will help you plan and adopt the right mindset for success. If you are working or have significant family responsibilities, planning ahead is critical. And if you are a full-time law student, you will serve yourself well by cementing good habits and making any necessary improvements as early as possible.

Focus also on physical, mental, and financial readiness. Put aside money for bar review and summer living expenses after graduation in a bar fund. (More on bar exam budgeting in Chapter 2.)

By knowing what to expect and planning for it, you will free up an enormous amount of energy, likely do better in school, and possibly have more time in 3L for self-care and for externships, clinics, or extracurricular activities to round out your resume.

Wherever you are in the process, consider the bar exam not as an afterthought but as the main event. When you get there, you will need to give it your all, just as you would if you were starring in a Broadway show or climbing an enormous mountain peak. (I refer to the bar exam so often as the “law student’s Mount Everest” that one former student sent me a copy after he passed the exam of “The Man who Climbed Everest,” addressed to his favorite “Sherpa.”)

Give bar exam planning and preparation the kind of professional energy and attention to detail that you will want to give your clients when you are practicing—the kind of caring you would want from a lawyer representing you or a family member.

Do not dread this process. But do not underestimate how much it will take. Climbing this mountain will be tough, but exhilarating. Use every last ounce of energy. Don’t hold back. Learning to commit 100 percent with total focus, and marshalling all your resources to achieve what you seek, will serve you well for the rest of your life. It will help you achieve most any future goal to which you set your mind.

When you are tempted to express doubts or bitterness about *having* to take yet another test after graduation, remember this: One does not just wake up and decide, “I’m going to take a bar exam.” You *earn* the right to sit for the bar. When you walk into the first session of the first day of your bar exam, know that you *worked for* that seat. You sweated and sacrificed. You made an enormous investment. To even be allowed in the door, you toiled—in both high school and college. You went through countless application mazes. You took SATs and LSATs. And you survived the trying

and competitive years of law school. You earned your juris doctor (J.D.) degree, and you earned the right to take this test.

When you walk into your bar exam, walk in proud and humble. Know that you are *fortunate* to be there; you are among the most educated people in the world. You are working for a license that will give you possibilities that many people will never even dream of, let alone attain. I call legal education “a power tool for social change.” When you are licensed as an attorney, the world will know that you earned the right to wield that power tool.

#PowerToolForSocialChange, #PassTheBar, #RaisingtheBar, #IEarnedIt,
#LegalEducation, #BarExamSuccess