Transitioning to Civilian Life: A Roadmap for Military Lawyers

Presented by the American Bar Association Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division
TRANSITIONING TO CIVILIAN LIFE: A ROADMAP FOR MILITARY LAWYERS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Transitioning to Civilian Life: A Roadmap for Military Lawyers, created by the American Bar Association's Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division. I am pleased to offer this program for those military lawyers who are making a transition to the civilian work force.

The Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division’s mission is to serve the needs of the nation’s public lawyers. By promoting integrity and excellence among public advocates, providing services not obtainable elsewhere, and by highlighting their extraordinary work, the Division works to enhance the position of public lawyers and create camaraderie and pride within the public sector.

This program focuses on four main topics: interviewing skills, résumé writing, networking and the advantages of working for the government. Each panelist will take the lead on one of the topics. Audience members are strongly encouraged to participate in the discussion period.

Today’s program would not have been possible without the generous contributions of the panelists: John C. Cruden, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Environment and Natural Resources Division, U.S. Department of Justice; Colonel, U.S. Army (ret.); Alexander W. Purdue, Jr., Deputy General Counsel, Los Alamos National Laboratory; Colonel, U.S. Air Force (ret.); and Cynthia Rapp, Deputy Clerk, Supreme Court of the U.S.; Colonel, USAR.

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Moderator

Kenneth D. Gray

Kenneth D. Gray is the former Vice President for Student Affairs at West Virginia University. In this position he led programs, services, activities and resources that responded to the concerns and needs of West Virginia University students. The Office of Student Affairs strives to promote a positive student-centered campus culture, creating an environment where students can grow personally and intellectually.

He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from West Virginia State College in 1966, and was commissioned a second lieutenant from the Reserve Officers Training Corps. In 1969, he received his Juris Doctor degree from West Virginia University’s College of Law and entered active duty in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's (JAG) Corps. He served in various assignments during his military career culminating with his promotion to Major General and service as The Assistant Judge Advocate General of the Army from 1993-1997. He is the first and only African-American General Officer in the history of the JAG Corps since its creation in 1775.

His military awards include the U.S. Army Distinguished Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star, three awards of the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal and the Army Achievement Medal. He has also been inducted into the West Virginia State College ROTC Hall of Fame; received the Justicia Officium Award, the highest award given by the College of Law at West Virginia University; inducted into the Academy of Distinguished Alumni at West Virginia University; and received the National Bar Association's 1998 Gertrude E. Rush Distinguished Service Award for outstanding leadership and devoted service.

In May 1997, he assumed the duties as Vice President. In 2000, the Kenneth D. Gray Leadership Award was created by the West Virginia University Student Organization’s office in Gray's honor and is awarded on an annual basis to an outstanding student leader who exhibits exemplary leadership skills. In 2001, he was given the WVU Outstanding Alumni Award, and in 2002, he was awarded the Richard T. Feller Outstanding Alumni Award for Distinguished Service to Students.

In January 2003, he was presented with the 2003 Strong Men and Women: Excellence in Leadership Award by Dominion Energy, Richmond, Virginia. Other recipients of this honor include Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powell, Coretta Scott King, Michael Jordan, Maya Angelou, and Rosa Parks.

He and his wife Carolyn have two sons, two daughters-in-law, and three granddaughters.
Panelists

John C. Cruden
John C. Cruden is the President of the Environmental Law Institute (ELI). John came to ELI from the U.S. Department of Justice, where he served as the Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Environment and Natural Resources Division. In that capacity, he was responsible for supervising a wide variety of environmental litigation, including civil enforcement actions in federal court for the key environmental statutes, including Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, RCRA, Safe Drinking Water Act, and CERCLA/Superfund. In addition, he supervised wetland enforcement, challenges to EPA rule making, and environmental actions filed against the United States. Prior to becoming a career Deputy, John was Chief, Environmental Enforcement Section (EES).

John has spent most of his legal life litigating, teaching litigation-related subjects or supervising litigators. His two most recent positions before becoming Chief, EES, were at the Department of Justice and Department of the Army. John was Special Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General, Civil Division, from 1987 to 1988. From 1988 to 1991 he was the Chief Legislative Counsel for the Army. He has also been an agency General Counsel and an army lawyer where he received a number of awards and decorations.

Alexander W. Purdue, Jr.
Alexander W. Purdue is the Deputy General Counsel, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, NM. He is responsible for managing the work of the Business Law, Environmental Law, and Intellectual Property Practice Groups, supervising a staff of 30 attorneys, paralegals and administrative employees and acting as General Counsel during the absence of the incumbent. Al joined the Laboratory in July 2003 as a Staff Attorney in the Business Law Practice Group, shortly after retiring from the U.S. Air Force Judge Advocate General’s Department in the grade of Colonel. He was selected as Deputy General Counsel in September 2005.

Colonel Purdue was born in Hackensack, New Jersey in 1948 and raised in that state. He participated in the Naval ROTC program at the University of Wisconsin and was commissioned in the Regular Navy upon graduation in 1970. He served as a Communications Officer aboard the USS Eldorado (LCC-11), an amphibious force flagship, while the ship was deployed to Viet Nam. He transferred to Beachmaster Unit 2, Norfolk, Virginia in 1972, and served as the commander of a 100-person Beach Group Team that was frequently deployed to the Mediterranean Area of Operations.

After leaving active duty in 1974, Colonel Purdue attended law school at the University of Tennessee and was elected by the faculty to the Order of the Coif upon graduation in 1977. He was admitted to the Tennessee Bar and was competitively selected for a direct commission as an Air Force judge advocate. Colonel Purdue served as an Assistant Staff Judge Advocate at George AFB, California and Ramstein Air Base, Germany. In 1984, he was transferred to Headquarters Ninth Air Force at Shaw AFB, South Carolina, where he served as Assistant Chief of International Law. In that position, Al drafted and implemented the tri-service procurement system used to support “Bright Star 85,” as well as all subsequent operations in the theatre, and
personally negotiated a number of international agreements and contracts with governments throughout Southwest Asia.

In 1986, Colonel Purdue was selected to obtain a Master of Laws Degree in Government Procurement Law from the National Law Center at George Washington University. After graduating in 1987, he was assigned as Chief of Contract Law, Air Force Contract Management Division, Kirtland AFB, New Mexico. He next served as Staff Judge Advocate, Lindsey Air Station, Germany. That assignment was followed by a second Staff Judge Advocate assignment, this time at Andrews AFB, Maryland. In 1995, he began serving as Chief of Commercial Litigation at the Air Force Legal Services Agency, Washington, DC. In that role, he was responsible for all Air Force contract and intellectual property cases then in litigation before the federal courts, with a total of over $2 billion at risk. From 1997 through 2000 he served as the Deputy Staff Judge Advocate, Air Force Materiel Command, was responsible for legal operations at the 17 bases that were then part of the command, and personally assumed responsibility for defending a $1 billion asbestos case filed at Kelly Air Logistics Center in San Antonio, Texas. Although defense of the Kelly case consumed 4 years and cost over $10 million, it ended with the complete vindication of the Air Force. In August, 2000, Colonel Purdue was appointed as the Air Force Chief Trial Attorney where he was responsible for over 200 procurement cases appealed to the Armed Services Board of Contract Appeals and supervised the Air Force Contract Trial Team’s staff of 55 attorneys, paralegals, and support personnel. He continued to serve as Chief Trial Attorney until retiring from the Air Force in the summer of 2003.

Colonel Purdue is a graduate of Squadron Officer’s School, the Air Command and Staff College and the Air War College. His military decorations include the Legion of Merit, the Meritorious Service Medal with five Oak Leaf Clusters and the Air Force Commendation Medal. He has been admitted to the bar in Tennessee and New Mexico, the Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces, the US Court of Federal Claims, and the US Supreme Court. Al is married to the former Sherida Blaesing of Racine, Wisconsin.

Cynthia J. Rapp

Cynthia J. Rapp, Esquire is a Deputy Clerk with the Supreme Court of the United States. As Deputy her responsibilities include preparing the Court’s Orders List, managing the Court’s Original Case Docket, preparing the Court’s Journal and statistics. In addition she handles major projects for the Clerk’s Office to include managing the creation and implementation of a new docketing system. Previously she served 10 years as a staff attorney in the Clerk’s Office where her main duties included coordinating the filings received in capital cases that had a scheduled execution date. Prior to working at the Supreme Court Ms. Rapp served on active duty in the Army Judge Advocate General’s Corp. Her military assignments included clerk for three appellate judges; defense appellate attorney; prosecutor; and legal assistance attorney. She is currently a Colonel in the United States Army Reserves.

Ms. Rapp graduated cum laude from Boston University in 1984 and received her law degree with honors from George Washington University in 1987. She is 1997 Fellow of the Institute for Court Management.
Ms. Rapp is a member of the Virginia and the District of Columbia Bars. She is active in the Federal Bar Association and currently serves on the Council for the Capital Hill Chapter. She is a Past Chair of the Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association and is currently serving on the Division’s Council. She has also served on the Council of the ABA’s General Practice Section. She is a member of the National Conference of Appellate Court Clerks and currently serves on the executive board. In the past she served as chair of the scholarship committee and sat on the awards committee.
THINKING ABOUT RETIREMENT? SOME OBSERVATIONS
BY BILL SUTER & BILL LEHMANN
16TH EDITION (2008)

When we retired from the Army some years ago, we thought it would be helpful to our Judge Advocate General's Corps friends on active duty if we preserved some of our observations and experiences. We did so and we update this monograph annually. It has been exceptionally well received. While it is principally directed to judge advocates nearing retirement, it is also useful to all military members departing the service after one or more tours.

THE DECISION

Make your decision to retire or leave the service and stick to it. Do not procrastinate! Sitting on the fence and "threatening" retirement are harmful to you and your family and hinder your civilian employment opportunities. Once you decide to retire, set up goals and milestones and follow them. Incidentally, it is always a good practice to notify the Personnel Plans and Training Office one year in advance of your retirement. That allows for an orderly reassignment process. Retiring with minimum notice creates problems for the Corps and gives the impression that you are selfish. That is not the reputation you want.

Once the decision to leave the military is made, regardless of the reason, some individuals become angry, feel sorry for themselves, and ask: "Why me, after all I've done for the Army?" That will wear off, but sometimes it leaves soon-to-be-civilians with an empty feeling of powerlessness and depression. Be careful. There is no reason for you to feel that way. There are three keys to dealing with this situation. First, take an accurate, realistic inventory of your marketable skills. Second, you need to learn a new skill - how to look for a job effectively and efficiently. Third, approach the job market in a diligent, professional manner that ensures a high probability of success.

After you have made the decision to retire, you still face several big decisions. WHERE do you want to live? WHAT type of work do you want to do? What are your GOALS? You should involve your family members in making these decisions. They have followed you and military orders for many years and they now deserve caring consideration as you enter the new phases of life. In making these decisions, you need to be open minded, consult with others, and do some homework. Law firms and other prospective employers are not going to call you and offer jobs when they hear you are available. As you start thinking about the type of work you want to do, be aggressive and decisive, but do not be afraid to "raise your sights to a lower level." In other words, you might need to think smaller. Too many judge advocates preparing for retirement have aspirations of teaching at a law school or joining a big law firm. Remember, there are many good lawyers out there looking for jobs and the competition is stiff. Nevertheless, be positive and have confidence in yourself. We will not offer any advice on selecting a place to live except to say that you need to be careful about retiring in that "little town we have always dreamed about."

So far, we have assumed that you will want to work after leaving the service. Some of you, however, will simply want to retire, fish, travel, and whack a little white ball down the fairway. We have several friends who have lived happily without a second career. Others, however, have not fared so well. Some did not realize that their retired pay was insufficient to sustain them
satisfactorily and others did not know what to do with their time. For some, inactivity leads to a loss of purpose, prestige, and sense of worth. Our advice: if you do not embark on a second career, stay busy and do something worthwhile with your time. There are many charitable institutions, schools, and civic organizations that can use your talents. Be careful not to count on your Social Security retirement income being worth much when you reach the age to receive benefits. Financial experts predict that Social Security benefits in the future will be reduced by about 25% from what is now being promised.

Although the federal workforce is being reduced, do not overlook it as a job market. There are always vacancies. Also, some agencies, especially in law enforcement and national security, are growing. The repeal of the Dual Compensation Act in 1999 made federal employment much more attractive for military retirees. If you are looking for a federal job, become familiar with the Federal Employees' Retirement System. The federal Thrift Savings Plan, a deferred compensation investment plan, is particularly attractive because it has paid a healthy return and the government contributes a generous amount of your pay tax-free annually. Military academy graduates can “buy back” their undergraduate school years for a modest amount and count those years toward federal retirement. Also, do not overlook state and local governments. Many are modeled on the federal government and their structure will be familiar to you. The pay will probably be less, but these governments are growing and many provide a bright future.

Join the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), formerly named The Retired Officers Association (TROA). Join now! MOAA’s website is http://www.moaa.org/. It is a great organization that has much to offer. In particular, MOAA will send you a booklet containing valuable information about searching for a job and writing resumes. The "Strategy of Career Transition" course offered in Washington, DC, is highly recommended by the JAG officers who have taken it. Also, contact the Army & Air Force Mutual Aid Association and arrange for a briefing for you and your spouse concerning insurance, investments, and estate planning. The Association is a superb organization that can answer all your questions.

THE NETWORK

Make a list of everyone you know who might be of help to you in looking for a job. List names, mailing and e-mail addresses, and phone numbers. Put the names in alphabetical order. You should compile this as soon as possible. Keep the list in your desk and review it daily and add names as you think of them. You will be surprised how soon you have fifty or more names. It takes time to perfect this list, but you will be glad you have it when you circulate your resumes. They call this networking. Believe us, your true friends are great assets. Networking is the best way to find a job. It is much more effective than sending out hundreds of resumes or using a search (headhunter) firm.

Read the National Law Journal every week. If you do not have access to a copy, purchase a subscription. It has excellent articles and numerous position opportunity advertisements. I know of one retiree who landed a terrific job that he learned about by reading the Journal. If you are interested in working in the Washington, DC area, read the weekly Legal Times.
One successful JAG retiree informed us that he found his job opening on the Office of Personnel Management web site: http://www.usajobs.opm.gov. It lists information concerning positions all over the country.

If you plan on working in Washington, DC, join the DC Bar. It takes about six months to accomplish this, so start early. Admission is by reciprocity.

It is never too late to join the Federal Bar Association, the American Bar Association, the National Bar Association, or other professional associations. We know several senior officers who were too uninterested or too cheap to join until their twilight years in the service. Dumb! Professional associations are great places to learn, contribute to your profession, and make lasting contacts.

Army JAGC retirees should be aware of the unofficial “Old Fuds” organization. There are over one hundred Army JAGC retirees in the Washington, DC area. They gather for lunch each April and October. To add your name to the list, when eligible, e-mail Lynn Holtz at lholtz@supremecourt.gov

THE RESUME

There are many resources available to help you write a resume. Use them! Here are a few thoughts. Resumes should be only one or two pages. Use civilian terms (e.g., "senior legal advisor" instead of "staff judge advocate," "felony court judge" instead of "general court-martial judge," "law professor" instead of "instructor"). We are not encouraging puffing. The point is that you must write so the reader will understand what you are saying. Have others review your resume and critique it. Review resumes of friends who have retired. The federal government no longer uses the SF 171 as the standard employment application. Some agencies are still using it, but most have adopted the OF 612 or use your resume supplemented by the OF 306. Complete the appropriate forms in case you want to apply for employment with the federal government. If possible, use computer software programs that produce the forms. Do not attempt to "fill in the blanks" the way it was done in the era before personal computers. These forms are difficult to complete, so take your time and have them ready.

Tailor your resume to fit the position for which you are applying. For instance, if you are seeking a position that deals with personnel management and budget, emphasize your experience and expertise in those areas.

When you list references, be smart. Listing high-ranking military officers is usually not as helpful as providing the names of those that know you well and are working in the field for which you are applying. Never list a reference without that individual’s consent. The opinion of a retired lieutenant colonel that works in the office of a state attorney general and thinks highly of you will carry more weight than that of an Army general who is unknown outside the E-ring of the Pentagon.
Always be sure that your references have an updated copy of your resume available. It is handy for them to use in the event they are called for more information about you. Also, many employers will ask your primary reference for the names of "other people who might know you." Help your primary reference prepare for this.

When you send out resumes, use a cover letter. Be meticulous in keeping records on who you write. Likewise, always record the date you get responses and keep a file. If anyone helps (e.g., gives you a lead or takes you to lunch), send a "thank you" note immediately and keep a record of that too.

THE INTERVIEW

Interviews are important. Many of us have interviewed others, particularly during the last part of our careers, but rarely were we interviewed by others. Study the subject and consult with friends who have been interviewed. Our advice: know the job; know your interviewer; listen; do not talk too much; and be yourself. When you apply for a job, take the time to learn something about it. Then, if you are lucky and get a call for an interview, you will be in a position to answer unexpected questions about the job. We know of one prospect that did exceptionally well in an interview when the interviewers learned that he had spent an entire day at a similar office learning all he could about the job. Remember that everyone you meet during an interview is a potential interviewer - from secretaries, through the personnel staff, to the president of a company. Be nice to everyone. You never know who is connected to whom in an organization. Continue an all-out job hunt until you are absolutely sure of a new job. Do not assume that oral promises of a job or reference checks that seem to take forever mean you will actually be hired. The prospective employer may be stringing you along because of internal conditions or any of a variety of reasons. Waiting for word to report to work costs you time and momentum in your search if you do not get the job.

Telephone employment screening is on the rise. To cut back on interviewing time, companies are doing their initial employment screening over the phone. Typically, a lower-level employee calls the person to verify a resume, seek clarification on certain matters, and decide whether this is a hot prospect. Do not take such calls lightly. When you take such a call, stand up. This makes you sound more energetic to help convince the screener that you are a top candidate.

Do not be surprised if your civilian interviewer knows nothing about the practice of law in the military. There are many misconceptions and misunderstandings about the military profession. At the appropriate time, take the opportunity to politely educate your interviewer. A senior federal judge asked one of us recently if a retired Colonel who applied for a position in the judiciary would have any trouble supervising civilians after all those years being with military personnel only. He was surprised to learn that legal offices have many civilian employees and that military members spend a great deal of time with civilian employees. By the way, the Colonel got the job. Stress the diverse nature of our law practice and the similarities to civilian practice. Remember that few civilian lawyers have very much leadership, supervisory, or management experience. This is not meant to demean them. Many fine lawyers simply do not know how to manage their offices and
subordinates. Perhaps that is why numerous law firms hire former military personnel as law office managers.

Will Rogers once said: "You never get a second chance to make a good first impression." So, dress appropriately! Go to a top-flight clothing store and have a consultant help you "get dressed." A $3,000 to $5,000 expenditure is an investment. Do not be cheap. Get outfitted from top to bottom. For men, get shirts, ties, suits, socks, shoes, and belts. I know of several interviews that went poorly because the interviewer was "turned off" by the way the applicant dressed. One interviewer said, "I wish he had not worn those Army shoes and black socks." Get rid of your Infantry "rubber watch" with the compass attachment. Most civilians know little about military life and it is up to you to adapt, not them. Thus, a simple "yes" to an interview question is preferable to "roger that."

You undoubtedly have had a successful military career and you know little about the "R" word. Yes, believe it or not, you will probably be rejected one or more times in your search for a position. Do not get discouraged! This is particularly important for the period immediately following your mass mailing of resumes. You will check the mail daily, but more often than not you will hear from your creditors rather than prospective employers. Be patient! But, be persistent!

Do not take the first offer you receive just because you get it. On the other hand, do not procrastinate. Some people wait too long and after a certain time they are unemployable because of their "resume gap." If it looks like you are not going to locate a job before you retire, find something to do that you can enter on your resume. Performing pro bono work, or taking classes are examples of something that will keep you occupied and look acceptable on your resume.

THE RETIREMENT PAPERWORK

Get a thorough military physical examination before you retire. Insist on it. At the same time, make a copy of your medical and dental records. You will need them. Have the examining physician help you with identifying the right medical terms for anything that is wrong with you. It is essential that you list every "ache and pain" on the Department of Veterans Affairs claims form. It is well known that the VA is more benevolent than the armed services when it comes to recognizing a physical disability. The laws pertaining to "physical disability retirement" and "VA disability" are quite different. After you retire, you will hear from the VA in about four to six months and you will be directed to a VA hospital for an examination. In many cases this is a frustrating experience because of the heavy workload of the hospital and staff. Be patient and do not give up. Several months after the examination you will hear from the VA Regional Office. Be sure to pursue your appellate rights (Board of Veterans Appeals and U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims) if you are dissatisfied with the determination. At present, disability payments from VA are tax free, but your retired pay is reduced by the amount received from VA. Recent legislation was enacted to give some relief to those with a 50% or higher disability rating. We know one retiree who is receiving total quality medical care at a VA facility solely because of the preference he gets based on his 10% VA disability rating.
The conventional wisdom is that you should always cash in your accrued leave upon retirement rather than taking leave prior to your retirement. There are exceptions, but do not guess - call the Army & Air Force Mutual Aid Association for advice. If you have a spouse or family, take full advantage of the Survivors Benefit Plan. It is a superb plan.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

If you accept civilian employment and your employer offers to pay for your move to another location, including closing costs, points, and other incidentals, be sure to look at the income tax consequences. These items are usually taxable to you and some companies will compensate you for your additional tax liability if you ask for it. This is called "grossing up."

If you do not move your household goods when you retire, be aware that you can ask the Army to defer your final move entitlement. Some retirees have preserved this benefit for several years after retirement and then used it.

Be sure and thoroughly review your medical insurance needs. This is a complex area, but many retirees find that one of the MOAA CHAMPUS supplement options will suffice when you are covered by TRICARE. The TRICARE for Life system created by Congress in 2000 is an excellent program that will obviate the need for a CHAMPUS supplement when you are eligible for Social Security. Do your homework and get smart in this area before making any decisions.

Be prepared for the state income tax shock if you have previously avoided state taxes because your domicile was Texas or other military haven. Virginia, for example, has a rather stiff income tax. State income taxes will be withheld from your military retired pay, but you must tell the finance center how much you want deducted.

If you join a law firm, be sure that you completely understand all aspects of the employment or partnership agreement. The agreement must be in writing. One retiree we know associated with another lawyer with the oral understanding that profits would be "divided equally." A year later he learned that his partner had a different interpretation of "divided equally" than he had. Another retiree friend joined a small firm with the oral understanding that the firm members would divide expenses and that each member would profit from cases he generated. After a year he was surprised to learn that he was required to contribute $50,000 in order to continue in the firm.

If you take a position with the federal government, be sure you understand the pay system. There are several different systems. When you are negotiating for your salary, do not use your military leave and earning statement as a basis of your present income. Use your "regular military compensation" amount furnished by DOD. You can calculate your figure at this web site: http://www.defenselink.mil/militarypay/pay/calc/index.html. It shows your true income by reflecting tax breaks, costs of medical care, and other hidden benefits. Use that income amount when you negotiate. Your real military income is higher than you think. Try to negotiate for an equivalent or higher amount. This tactic can also be used when negotiating for employment with a non-federal entity. Some non-governmental organizations will tell you that you should make less because you are drawing a military "pension." They sometimes think your retirement income is
high. It is not. We urge you to avoid letting your retired pay become a part of the negotiation process.

Another important factor to consider if you take a federal job is annual leave. If you retire and then take a federal job, you will earn only four hours of leave for each of the twenty-six annual pay periods. After three years, you receive six hours; after fifteen years, you receive eight hours. Those leaving active duty, but not retiring, can count their military service when computing leave entitlement. All employees receive four hours of sick leave for each pay period, regardless of your length of service.

Do not resign or retire from the military until you are sure you have a job guaranteed in writing. Some federal agencies will not hire you until you have a security clearance. This could take several months to process. Some organizations do not recognize military security clearances and you must start the process anew. If possible, you should avoid time between jobs in a “no pay” status.

Believe it or not, some day you will be eligible to receive Social Security benefits. Prior to 2000, if you were under 70 years of age you were essentially forced to quit working if you wanted to draw the benefits. Congress amended the law in 2000 so that now you can have unlimited earned income (e.g., pay from a job as distinguished from investment income) and still draw full Social Security benefits. The eligibility age for drawing benefits was 65 for many years. The age requirement is increasing annually. If you start drawing reduced Social Security benefits at age 62 and continue working, there is a stiff offset that in most instances eliminates your benefits.

CONCLUSION

Lastly, we urge you to prepare yourself for the job search long before you plan to begin your second career. Looking for a job is a full time job! The three most important ingredients are preparation, preparation, and preparation. Attack this as if it is the most important thing you have ever done.

GOOD LUCK!
Advice for Military Lawyers Transitioning to Civilian Life
By John J. Copelan, Jr. and Harry Herrick

I. What Civilian Employers Can Do to Help Active Duty Transition
   a. Relocation bonus
   b. Flexible start date
   c. Sponsorship program – In the military, new recruits are appointed a sponsor to help them get information on relocation and help them integrate into the office; it is basically a mentor plus program.
   d. Introduction to the organization

II. What You Can Do Before Separation to Prepare to Get a Civilian Job
   1. Build your résumé and enhance marketability while on active duty
      a. Specialize, if possible (i.e., courtroom experience, government contracts, labor law, environmental law, negligence).
      b. Gain management experience (i.e., volunteer to be SJA on exercises).
      c. Do a good job! Build résumé, references and writing samples.
      d. Explain your experience in plain language. Avoid acronyms that are meaningless to civilian employers.
   2. Inventory your experiences, likes, job requirements, etc. and put together a job search/separation game plan
      a. What type of job are you interested in? Do you qualify for? Consider geographic location and timing.
      b. Types of jobs to consider (varies by specific interests and qualifications)
         i. Federal legal (labor, government contract law, etc.) You may be very competitive for these jobs depending on experience.
         ii. State or local government legal (i.e., agencies, Attorney General, prosecutor, legal aid, etc.)
         iii. Private law firm, small, medium or large – Larger firms are usually looking for extremely high academics from top tier schools.
         iv. In-house counsel – Often requires significant subject matter experience and/or private law firm experience.
         v. Non-legal – Experience in government contract law and security clearance makes you competitive for positions with defense contractors in a non-legal capacity (i.e., as a contract specialist or administrator).
      c. Timing challenge – Giving six months notice to separate makes it difficult to have a job lined up before making the decision to separate. However, there are things to do to make it easier:
         i. Test the waters (i.e., send a résumé to employers at a big firm, if that is your interest, before giving notice to make sure you are competitive for the type of job you are leaving active duty for)
         ii. Federal government hiring process takes several months. Dept. of Defense employers are usually flexible with start dates for transitioning military. Start applying for these jobs even before putting paperwork in to separate.
iii. State and local government job hiring process is usually quicker than Federal, but not as flexible with start dates for transitioning military. State, local and federal employers may give a veteran's preference and military time may be credited toward leave time or sold back toward pension.

iv. Save two months terminal leave to use to pay bills if there is no immediate job after separation. Do not sell back time because you will lose BAH.

3. **Gather and safeguard documents**
   a. OPRs, medal write-ups, etc.
   b. Certificate of Good Standing from Bar
   c. Transcripts
   d. Reference list – Continually update as military personnel move frequently.
   e. DD214 (after separation)

4. **Update résumé**
   a. Create master résumé and job specific résumés.
   b. Demilitarize your résumé – Translate military skills into civilian terms.

5. **Inventory and clean up writing samples**
   a. Organize writing samples by job type.
   b. Writing samples should compliment résumé and be appropriate for specific job type.

6. **Write cover letters**
   a. Create a master cover letter.
   b. Create job specific and/or geography specific cover letter templates.

7. **Brainstorm contact list**
   a. Friends, family, former professors, former co-workers, former employers (including internships, associateships, etc.)
   b. Look for military connections – Employers in reserve or retired military

8. **Contact law school career resource center**
   a. Ask them to review résumé and cover letters and provide input.
   b. Provide them a copy of résumé and tell them what type of job you are looking for.
   c. Gain access to job list and reciprocity for other law schools/career resource centers in other geographic areas.
   d. Ask for contact info of alumni in job type/geographic area you are searching in.

9. **Create database based on job search game plan**
   a. Create separate database for different job type and employer type.
   b. Database should include name of employer, employer contact information, a link to the résumé and cover letter you sent to specific employer, notes and a tracking column that shows any communications with employers and responses.

10. **Recruiters – To use or not to use**
    a. Most government jobs are not listed with recruiters.
    b. Recruiters may be helpful to attain corporate jobs with large law firms, in-house counsel, and non-legal jobs with defense contractors where security clearance is desired.
11. Be proactive in your job search
   a. Always follow-up with calls; show interest. You are your best advocate.
      Make your case!
   b. Several years before your transition, become active in state, local and federal
      bar associations and specialty bar groups and sections.

III. Where to Search for Jobs
      includes jobs found on employer websites that are not advertised on other free
      search sites so it saves time of looking at specific websites.
   b. http://www.careerbuilder.com – Good for private law firms, in-house counsel,
      some state government jobs and non-profit organizations. Also, good if you have
      government contract experience and a security clearance and are interested in
      defense contractor non-legal work (i.e., contract specialist, administrator, etc.).
   e. State Bar association website
   f. Recruiters
   g. http://www.abanet.org/careercounsel/finding.html
   h. http://www.usajobs.com – Most federal civilian service jobs are listed. Option to
      create job search agent and post résumé.
   i. State employment websites
   j. http://www.martindale.com – Not a job search site, but a good resource for info
      about firms and specific attorneys.
   k. Specific employer websites
   l. Local newspapers
   m. Hit the pavement – Put on a new, tailored suit and have a résumé, writing sample,
      transcript and reference on hand. Go door-to-door to employers that interest you.

IV. About the Authors

   John J. Copelan, Jr. is General Counsel for the Florida Department of Children
   and Families, where he manages a statewide public law firm of over 40 lawyers in the
   General Counsel’s office. Annually, the office handles over 1,100 contracts worth
   approximately $1.5 billion. Mr. Copelan provides legal counsel to the Secretary and
   Program Offices of the Department and supervises the regional legal offices. Mr.
   Copelan also served in the United States Army Judge Advocate General’s Corp.

   Harry Herrick is a contract attorney for the Naval Surface Warfare Center. He
   previously worked for the Department of Children and Families as a procurement and
   contract attorney in the General Counsel’s office. Before joining the Department, Mr.
   Herrick served in the United States Air Force Judge Advocate General’s Corp.
When you apply for a job, you want to make a good first impression. Any employer will read your written materials carefully, but legal employers are especially justified in closely scrutinizing your cover letter and résumé. After all, among the most important of all legal skills is written communication.

So treat your cover letter and résumé as if they were critical documents prepared for a valuable client. Here’s how to approach them:

1. **Aim for perfect prose**
   Even though your résumé is probably the most important part of your written application, your cover letter is what the prospective employer will see first. Do not assume that the employer won’t read it. Because it is your first chance to make an impression, your cover letter ought to be smooth, readable, and error free. To present the most polished prose you can, follow these suggestions:
   - Use impossibly correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
   - Use direct words instead of qualifiers and intensifiers.
   - Choose the right words and avoid trendy ones.

   Let’s practice using these suggestions. Read the following actual cover letter, in which I have altered the name of the prospective employer. The applicant seeks an entry-level associate position.

   **Dear Mr. Scheiss:**

   The opportunity to pursue an associate position with Scheiss & Associates is extremely attractive to me. The firm’s reputation as both an innovative and forward-thinking organization is quite admirable. I am very interested in learning more about the firm and in bringing my personal strengths to your firm.

   My strong liberal arts background and extensive leadership experience has served to enhance my analytical, communication and writing abilities. Through extracurricular activities and volunteer work, I have gained valuable insight into the dynamics of working with others. Multiple internships with a major law firm gave me practical experience in combining verbal and written skills with the specific needs of the firm. A well-rounded learning experience at King’s College in London also honed my analytical and communication abilities.

   I am eager to attain an opportunity to extend the qualities I have to offer to Scheiss & Associates. Your consideration of my candidacy as an associate is much appreciated. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss further how my qualities are a fit with Scheiss & Associates.

Wayne Schiess is a legal-writing instructor at the University of Texas School of Law. This article is excerpted from his forthcoming book, **Writing for the Legal Audience**, from Carolina Academic Press. Visit Schiess at http://LegalWriting.net.
Now let's assess the strength of this letter on the three suggestions for polished prose. **Grammar, punctuation, and spelling.** When you have an established relationship with the recipient, she might forgive you for a minor spelling mistake or slight grammatical flaw. But in a letter asking for a job from someone you don't know, you can't afford to let anything—even a missing comma—distract the employer from the good impression you're trying to make.

You may have noticed some grammar, punctuation, and spelling mistakes in this letter. I noted these mistakes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scheiss</td>
<td>Spelling; it's / before e: Schiess.</td>
<td>Ouch! You'd better not misspell the name of the person you are writing to. Triple check it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liberal arts background and extensive leadership experience has served</td>
<td>Verb agreement; has should be have.</td>
<td>Because the sentence has a dual subject, the verb must be plural.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analytical, communication and writing abilities</td>
<td>Serial comma; should be analytical, communication, and writing abilities with a comma before the and.</td>
<td>Outside legal writing (literature, journalism), the serial comma is optional. But legal writing is a form of technical writing, so get in the habit of using the serial comma; every legal writing and technical writing book recommends it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any one of these problems could distract the reader from your qualifications. So edit carefully and proofread thoroughly.

It may help to have another person read over your cover letter to check for errors. A fresh set of eyes will often catch the small mistakes you missed.

**Strong, direct words instead of intensifiers.** Perhaps it's counterintuitive, but intensifiers, like extremely, tend to weaken prose, not intensify it. This letter has four intensifiers: extremely, quite, very, and much. Not only do they fail to strengthen the writing, but they also weary the reader because there are so many of them. If everything in the letter is extremely something or very something, the intensifying effect is soon lost.

In all four cases in this letter, the sentence is fine without the intensifier. In fact, all four sentences are better if we omit the intensifier. So make it a practice to leave out the intensifier or choose a stronger word that doesn't need intensifying.

**The right word.** Get a good dictionary, and use it. But dictionaries can tell you only what a word means. If you want to know how a word ought to be used, you'll need a usage dictionary. Usage dictionaries also teach you about grammar and style. They'll tell you what words and phrases are misused, inflated, or outdated, and they'll explain common errors and misspellings.

Two of the best, which focus on general English usage, are


Lawyers have an excellent resource all their own:


I recommend Garner's book for every lawyer. It is thorough and reliable, and it contains short essays on many topics lawyers will find useful.

The usage concerns in the original letter are minor, but both distracted me:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dynamics</td>
<td>Usage; this is a trendy or &quot;vogue word,&quot; as Garner puts it.</td>
<td>If it's a vogue word, many other writers will be using it. So make your letter stand out by not choosing the vogue word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attain</td>
<td>Usage; probably not the meaning the writer wants here.</td>
<td>Attain means &quot;to gain or accomplish.&quot; Here, the writer is asking for something, not accomplishing something. The usage is awkward.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Be concrete

Vague generalities get lost in the reader’s mind. Providing specific details emphasizes them. For example, if you want to tell the reader about the extra things you have done that set you apart, you might write:

✓ Through extracurricular activities and volunteer work, I have gained valuable insight....

But the reader will quickly forget that vague and general statement. Or worse, it will annoy: What activities? What volunteer work? It does not give the reader a picture to remember or an image to keep in mind.

If you really want to emphasize the extra things you have done, you would be more successful if you wrote:

✓ Through working on The Journal of Appellate Practice and volunteering at the law school writing clinic, I have gained valuable insight....

These vivid sentences provide concrete details that a reader can picture. Most lawyers will know exactly what it means to have worked on a journal. And it’s easy to imagine your advising students who have come to the clinic with questions.

On the other hand, providing too much detail can bore the reader and pointlessly lengthen the text. To explain the extra things you have done, you probably would not write:

✓ As a staffer on The Journal of Appellate Practice, I participated in 11 cite-checks in the second semester of my second year. I supervised eight more during the first semester of my third year. One of the cite-checks was novel because we needed to find a rare international treaty....

That’s tedious.

When writing to a prospective employer, be concrete about your accomplishments, be specific about your activities, and explain the details of what you can do. And do it without providing tedious detail.

Here is our cover letter again. I’ve corrected the errors discussed in Section 1 and highlighted the vague, nonspecific phrases.

Dear Mr. Schiess:

The opportunity to pursue an associate position with Schiess & Associates is attractive to me. The firm’s reputation as both an innovative and forward-thinking organization is admirable. I am interested in learning more about the firm and in bringing my personal strengths to your firm.

My strong liberal arts background and extensive leadership experience have served to enhance my analytical, communication, and writing abilities. Through extracurricular activities and volunteer work, I have gained valuable insight into effectively working with others. Multiple internships with a major law firm gave me practical experience in combining verbal and written skills with the specific needs of the firm. A well-rounded learning experience at King’s College in London also honed my analytical and communication abilities.

I am eager for an opportunity to extend the qualities I have to offer to Schiess & Associates. Your consideration of my candidacy as an associate is appreciated. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss further how my qualities are a fit with Schiess & Associates.
Now that I've highlighted the general, non-detailed statements, it ought to strike you how weak those statements are. The thinking reader is left with many questions. Here are the most glaring general statements and the questions I had:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>an innovative and forward-thinking organization</td>
<td>What is it about the firm that makes it innovative and forward thinking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my personal strengths</td>
<td>Which are?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>liberal arts background</td>
<td>A vague statement; what field, specifically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extensive leadership experience</td>
<td>What was that experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volunteer work</td>
<td>Of what kind?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>major law firm</td>
<td>Which one? Now I'm wondering if there is a reason you're not naming it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>needs of the firm</td>
<td>A bad reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extracurricular activities</td>
<td>What were those activities? Were any of them relevant to practicing law?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well-rounded learning experience at King's College</td>
<td>What made it well rounded? What did you do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This letter prompts many questions, and I was annoyed when I first read it. Nothing specific is ever mentioned.

Granted that the résumé will answer some of these questions, but this writer risks having the employer move on to someone else with a more memorable cover letter. Or if there are three dozen applicants, the writer risks having this letter fade into the mass of typical, general cover letters.

After highlighting the general statements, we see that the writer probably has brought up too many subjects for a short cover letter. The writer would be well advised to pick two or three strengths, mention them with specific details, and stop.

For my revision, I won't worry about length. Instead, I'll offer a revision that includes details for all the general statements. For purposes of the revision, assume that Schiess & Associates is an appellate-practice boutique. Here's the revised letter:

Dear Mr. Schiess:

The opportunity to pursue an associate position with Schiess & Associates is attractive to me. The firm’s reputation for producing high-caliber appellate briefs and court papers is admirable. I am interested in learning more about the firm and in bringing my writing strengths to your firm.

My college degree in English and my work as vice president of the law school student body have served to enhance my analytical, communication, and writing abilities. Through working on The Journal of Appellate Practice and volunteering at the law school writing clinic, I have gained valuable insight into effectively working with others. Multiple internships with Baker Botts LLP gave me practical experience in combining verbal and written skills in a traditional, general practice. My semester at King’s College in London, where I wrote three seminar papers, also honed my analytical and communication abilities.

This new letter tells a lot about the qualifications that make the applicant a strong candidate. It’s more memorable because it’s distinct from the run-of-the-mill cover letters the employer probably sees. And it invites better questions: instead of “What kind of volunteer work did you do?” the employer can ask, “What writing weaknesses did you see in the students at the clinic?”

In short, it gives the reader’s mind something to hold on to.

3. Be accurate and honest

When you represent a client, you must be honest in your dealings with others. Rule 4.1 of the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct provides that in the course of representing a client, “[A] lawyer shall not knowingly . . . make a false statement of material fact . . . to a third person.”

But what about when you’re representing yourself, as you are when you write a cover letter or send a résumé? Perhaps it goes without saying, but accuracy and honesty are required there, too. Deception in your cover letter or résumé can cost you the job and can result in bar discipline.

There’s not much more to say on this subject, so to drive the
point home, let me share some real-life examples of the dishonest things lawyers have put on their résumés. All received bar discipline or were held civilly liable for fraud:

✓ The lawyer's résumé said he had graduated from law school at the University of Southern California, but he had actually graduated from Western State University (In re Morse, 1 Cal. State Bar Ct. Rptr. 332, 336 (Review Dept. State Bar Ct. of Cal. 1991)).

✓ In an application for a law school teaching position, the lawyer's résumé said he was first in his class (he was 25th), editor in chief of the law review (he was a member of the editorial board), and Order of the Coif (he was not) (In re Hadži-Antich, 497 A.2d 1062, 1064 (D.C. Ct. App. 1985)).

✓ The lawyer's résumé, sent to win a potential client, said he had opened his practice in 1991 (it was 1994), had represented healthcare organizations (he had not), and had been licensed in New Jersey and Massachusetts (he had not) (Baker v. Dorfman, 239 F. 3d 415, 425 (2d Cir. 2000)).

✓ The lawyer's résumé exaggerated the time he had worked at some jobs and omitted other jobs in an effort to show a stable work history (In re Wohler, 650 N.Y.S. 2d 679, 680 (N.Y. App. Div. 1996)).

✓ The lawyer's résumé said he graduated from Yale when he was actually two credits short of graduation (In re Norden, 438 N.Y.S. 2d 788, 788 (N.Y. App. Div. 1981)).

These lawyers paid a high price for their deception and exaggeration. Learn from their mistakes; be scrupulously honest in what you write when applying for a job.

If you proofread carefully, if you strive to be concrete and specific about who you are and what you can do, and if you always tell the truth, your job application will stand out. It will interest the prospective employer. It will impress.
Resume A
UNCLASSIFIED

MELISSA L. SEEKER, CPT, U.S. Army

AFRC-JA DSN 478-3221
Washington, DC 20543-20770 Commercial (441) 352 3333

EDUCATION
Carbin University, University Town, Montana
JD, 2002
Carbin University, University Town, Montana
BA, Psych, 1999 No honors

EXPERIENCE
2002- Present
US Army JAGC- During my 5 years in the JAGC I have had experience
in all the various legal fields in an SJA office. I started in
LA where I had my own clients and assisted them in the
preparation of wills and separation agreements. Assisted in SRPs.
Next I moved on to AD Law where I reviewed various actions to
ensure compliance with the ARs. I also worked on FOIA requests,
LODs and ROS. Finally I ended up in CRIM Law as a TC. I am
prosecuting cases under the UCMJ. I have had 35 Courts Martials,
generally with members, only 2 have been MJ alone. Advised BN
Commanders on ROEs. Gave briefings on issues such as LOW, and
Ethics.

1996-1999
ROTC- Participated in all the ROTC activities. During the summers
went to ROTC Camp. Attended survival and RECONDO.

Summer of 1995
Joe's Diner, Waited tables

BAR AND PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS
Virginia Bar and District of Columbia Bar
Member, Capital Chapter FBA 2002-present
Member, ABA, GPSL 2002-present
Editor, ABA, GP Section's ML newsletter, 2003-2004

PROFESSIONAL AWARDS
Numerous medals including sharpshooter and marksmanship award

REFERENCES
Gen. Alfred A. Smith, Deputy Commander UCOM, Stuttgart, Germany
Col. John Davis, 8th Army HQ, Seoul, Korea
Capt. Samantha Johnson, GAD-DAD, Washington, DC

UNCLASSIFIED
Resume B

MELISSA L. SEEKER
Staff Judge Advocate Office
Fort Meade, MD 20555
mseeker@armyjag.gov
Work (432) 478-3221
Home (441) 352 3333

EXPERIENCE

11/2002 - Present
Judge Advocate General’s Corps, United States Army, Falt, Virginia and Fort Merry, Montana

- 8/2006 – Present
  Special Assistant United States Attorney
  Prosecuted numerous federal misdemeanors on behalf of the U.S. Attorney for the District of Maryland. Negotiated plea bargains and conducted arraignments, probation revocation hearings and sentencing hearings.

  Prosecutor
  Prosecuted felonies and misdemeanors at jury and bench trials. Advised military police, and commanders on all aspects of criminal investigations and procedure.

  Administrative Law Attorney
  Reviewed various actions to ensure compliance with Army regulations. Worked on Freedom of Information Act requests, Line of Duty investigations (to determine whether someone was on duty when an accident took place) and Reports of Surveys (to determine financial liability for lost, stolen or damaged property.)

  Legal Assistance Attorney
  Drafted wills, separation petitions, divorce complaints and Advised clients in the areas of estate planning, consumer disputes, domestic relations and landlord/tenant relations. Coordinated the Fort Merry Tax program.

1996-1999
Reserve Officer’s Training Corps (ROTC) - Participated in all the ROTC activities. Attended military classes, obtained leadership experience, learned military procedures. Attended ROTC Camp during the summer.

EDUCATION

- Bachelor of Arts, 1999, Psychology, Carbin University, University Town, Montana
- Juris Doctorate, 2002, Carbin University, University Town, Montana
- Additional Legal Training: JAG School, University of Virginia; and Contracts, Administrative Law and Trial Advocacy CLE Courses

BAR AND PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS
Virginia Bar and District of Columbia Bar
Member, Capital Chapter Federal Bar Association, 2002-present; Chair, Litigation Committee, 2004-present
Member, American Bar Association, Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division, 2002-present
Editor, American Bar Association, General Practice Section’s Military Lawyer’s newsletter, 2003-2004

REFERENCES
Available upon request
Jobs

by David C. James

Heeding interview tips can help you surpass candidates with better résumés

Your résumé gets you the interview, but what you do in the interview gets you the job. Based simply on their résumé power, some of your competitors may seem to have you beat. But by keeping the following 10 things in mind, you'll boost your chances of leapfrogging over other candidates to get the job you seek.

1. **Make a good first impression.** Employers begin their evaluation the moment they lay eyes on you. When you meet the interviewer, be psyched up. Give the interviewer a good, firm—but not bone-crushing—handshake while making good eye contact. If you don't naturally sparkle, ratchet up your sparkle quotient. Most applicants fail to be energetic and inspired in their interviews. You can't present yourself to your best advantage unless you're animated and engaging.

2. **Observe interview formalities.** You're being too chummy if you address interviewers you don't really know by their first names. And don't give short shrift to dressing appropriately. Employers want you to be dressed for their lawyers' most formal activity. You'll always be OK if you dress as you would for a jury trial. Avoid anything too high-fashion. Wear a conservative suit, with conservative accessories. Women who choose skirted business suits play it safer than women who choose pantsuits. Skirts that are too short or too long take suits out of the realm of business attire.

Smart employers know that applicants never look better than they do for their interviews. If an interviewer concludes you aren't dressed appropriately for the interview—a time dedicated to putting one's best foot forward—he or she won't count on your setting a higher standard on the job. The employer will avoid the problem simply by not hiring you.

3. **Be personable and easy to talk to.** Many job candidates adopt an interview persona: They become artificially inhibited and humorless. You need to preserve your natural spontaneity and ability to converse easily. Imagine how you talk to people you run across in relaxed situations without a lot riding on the conversations. If you're more natural in casual encounters, you need to work on being more comfortable in interviews. Practice in mock interviews. When you're as comfortable in your interviews as you are in conversations over the water cooler, you can expect to reap more than your share of job offers.

4. **Be responsive.** When interviewing, as when taking exams, you need to answer the call of the question. Don't take the interviewer's first question as your opportunity to launch into a monologue covering everything you think he or she ought to know. Wrestling control from the interviewer doesn't mean you're scoring points. Give interviewers a chance to ask what they want to know. When interviewers seem to venture far afield—by asking what you do for fun, for example—it could be because your résumé tells them you have the credentials they're looking for. The issue then becomes whether you bring the right intangibles—attitude, drive, determination, and interpersonal skills—they're looking for.

5. **Artfully frame your qualifications.** Describe your experience in terms of what the employer's lawyers do. For example, imagine a district attorney's office looking for a prosecutor. If you've prosecuted cases, you would say, "I'm a prosecutor." But if you've worked for a public defender, you would say, "I'm a criminal lawyer." Now let's say you have no criminal law experience, but you've worked in civil litigation. I've had applicants apologize: "I know, unlike lots of your applicants, I don't have any criminal law experience, but I can learn it." What they should have said is, "I'm a litigator. Your lawyers are trial attorneys. I'm a trial attorney."
You need to frame your experience differently depending on what you’re applying for. For example, a civil litigator applying for a court’s research attorney position would emphasize skills other than litigation: “I’m a researcher and writer.” Persuade the interviewer that you can do what the employer’s lawyers do.

6. Demonstrate—don’t merely recite—your good qualities. I’ve had many applicants lethargically claim to be enthusiastic, meekly claim to be confident. I’ve had applicants say to me—voices quavering, hands trembling—that they will be effective trial lawyers because they never get nervous. It’s not sufficient simply to claim you are enthusiastic, confident, interested, and the like. Your demeanor determines whether you’re credible.

7. Be positive, open-minded, and nonjudgmental. You’re being negative when you tell the interviewer you want to work for his or her firm because of (1) a boring summer experience somewhere else; (2) the poor quality of life in other kinds of practice; or (3) the desire to get into the real world and out of an uninspiring law school experience. If you raise the specter of being difficult to please, your prospects will plummet. Be strictly positive.

8. Come clean about grades. When asked about your academic standing, don’t resort to coy responses like, "My grades are respectable" or "I’m not in the top half." When faced with vague and ambiguous responses like these, employers are content to assume your grades are too low to be competitive. Be forthcoming. If you can, say: "I’m at the [so-and-so] percentile." And be positive: "I’ve done well in [certain kinds of classes]." Or, "I’m a hands-on learner and have enjoyed success clerking."

9. Ask only pertinent questions. Contrary to conventional wisdom, you needn’t ask questions simply for the sake of showing interest. Ill-considered questions will hurt you. Don’t ask questions that are hackneyed: "What do you like most and least about your job?" Or, "What is your typical day like?"

You appear unprepared when you introduce a question with, "I should know this, but ...." The same goes for, "What does your firm do?" and "Does your firm do [such and such]?" You might as well say, "I know next to nothing about your office. Can you tell me about it?"

Any questions you ask should be designed to impress the interviewer. Introduce your question with what you know: "I know your firm has [such and such a practice area]. Would I have the opportunity to become involved in that?"

You can convey that you are a motivated, hard-charging performer with a question like this: "I'm interested in how lawyers progress in your firm. I'm looking for a merit system in which lawyers who work harder and produce more reap greater rewards. How does your firm link compensation with performance?"

Be aware, however, that these questions aren’t always safe. You shouldn’t ask for information available in materials provided by the employer to your school or posted by the employer on its web site. If the answers to your questions were readily available to you before your interview, your questions reveal that you haven’t done your homework. Questions should do the opposite; they should reveal that you’re well prepared.

10. Go with the flow. Although rehearsed answers work for the questions you’ve anticipated, delivering canned answers is not your objective. Your objective is to be responsive and quick on your feet, to be at your best while going with the flow. You need to be responsive not just to questions but also to the tone the interviewer sets. If the interviewer is outgoing, don’t be reserved. If the interviewer structures the interview, don’t be freewheeling. You can’t totally plan how to behave. Be nimble. Your behavior should vary with the interviewer.

David C. James (dave.james@abanet.org) is the hiring lawyer for the office of the San Diego city attorney.
Advantages of Working for the Government

Jobs

Public agencies seek lawyers committed to their missions

by David C. James

Among legal employers, the government looms large. The federal government alone hires more lawyers than any other single employer. But "government" is more than the feds. It's the whole panoply of federal, state, and local agencies.

It's also more than just one practice area. Government lawyers work in almost every area of law imaginable. They do criminal law—prosecution as well as defense. They do intellectual property law, securities law, bankruptcy, tax law, real property law, environmental law, and litigation—plaintiff and defense. And the list goes on and on.

In many cases, especially in terms of job searching, a government agency isn't a single entity. Consider the U.S. Department of Justice, the biggest government employer. Within it are more than 35 organizations, each with a distinct hiring profile.

Although most government employers hire in the spring and don't participate in fall on-campus interviewing, this is not always the case. Large agencies with big budgets can join the fall interview season because they have enough resources to conduct paid summer intern programs and the funds to hire lawyers every year. If you pay attention only in the spring to the opportunities in government agencies, you'll miss the application deadlines of many offices that hire a significant number of law students and lawyers.

It's important to put in perspective common advice about working for the government. Many career advisers and others argue that government work is a good way for entry-level lawyers to get the experience law firms find attractive.

Former Baker & McKenzie recruiter Ann Turnicky, in her book How to Get the Job You Want in a Law Firm, writes that firms seek job applicants who have worked a few years with agencies such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, the Commerce Department, the Internal Revenue Service, and the Treasury Department.

This is good advice, but it has its limits. If you seek government work solely for this reason, you need to realize that the people who will interview you look at things differently. Applicants who tell government recruiters "I think your office is a great place to start" admit to seeing the agency merely as a steppingstone. Remember, government hiring lawyers have invested their careers in their agencies. Although they know not everyone they hire will end up staying, they look for lawyers who see their agencies as career opportunities, not as means to an end.

What else do government employers look for? Jeanne Svikhart, who has worked for a law school, for private law firms as a consultant, and now as an assistant director of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Attorney Recruitment and Management, offers an important insight: Government law offices are mission driven, not profit driven. This principle explains a lot about what's important to government employers. In Svikhart's words, when law students apply for government jobs, the hiring lawyers want to see "touchstones" the students have with what the agency does—that is, demonstrated interest in the agency's mission.

If you want to work for the SEC, for example, it's not enough to say you've always wanted to work for the government. You need to know what the SEC does. You need to know that it has four divisions. The SEC will look for touchstones on your résumé. The recruiter will evaluate how you have invested your time—whether your course selections, jobs, and volunteer activities demonstrate your interest in the SEC's
mission. Have you taken a class in securities regulation? Have you clerked in the securities area? The more touchstones, the stronger your application.

Agencies focus on these aspects for good reason. Unlike large firms, most government employers don’t have the luxury of hiring entry-level lawyers simply to do legal research. Lean budgets mean lawyers are given lots of responsibility right away. For entry-level lawyers, practicing for the government often means meeting with clients, managing caseloads, and trying cases. It is common for new prosecutors and defenders, for example, to try cases within weeks, or even days, of being hired.

Government hiring attorneys, therefore, emphasize the practical skills applicants bring to the table, not the prestige of attending a particular law school. They put a premium on honors in moot court, mock trial, and the like. Bill Trainor, a supervising deputy public defender in California’s San Diego County, quips, “We aren’t concerned about pedigree—we’re looking for sled dogs.”

Your commitment to the agency’s mission, your practical experience, and your desire to take on cases as soon as possible are good things to mention in a job interview. Another thing to think about is the quality of life many government employers offer. Many lawyers are willing to trade some salary for intangible benefits, such as a family-friendly setting. Most private firms, with their profit motive and competition for partnership, have not readily accommodated lawyers who want part-time work schedules, flextime, or opportunities for extended time off. In contrast, many government agencies have found they can compete for the best legal talent by offering the perks that many private firms won’t.

Quality of life isn’t just about working fewer hours. The passion and work ethic of many government lawyers drive them to work the kind of hours that are endemic in the profession. Watch government litigators trying cases, and you’ll see they put in long nights while they are in trial. And, of course, there are times the government’s transactional lawyers put in the same long days and nights as their private firm counterparts.

But long hours are just one component of the stresses of law practice. Government settings are a haven from the stresses of billing hours, being a profit center, and bringing in business. Another benefit is that many government employers, without the inhibiting effect of the profit motive, allow lawyers to transfer from practice areas in which they are experienced to areas in which it will take time for them to become as efficient.

When comparing government pay to that of private firms, remember to factor in the respective benefits packages—items such as health insurance, vacation time, and the benefits mentioned above. You generally can count on government positions to come with an attractive set of benefits, something that may not be true of small and medium-sized firms.

The number of law students and lawyers whose first choice is government service exceeds the number of available government jobs. Government employers, therefore, do not want to hire an applicant for whom government service is second choice, something the applicant is settling for. If you want to work for a government agency, you need to convince the interviewer that you’re interested in more than just a job. You need to convey a passion for the agency’s mission and demonstrate that you can help fulfill it.

David C. James (dave.james@abanet.org) recently retired after serving 20 years at the office of the San Diego city attorney. For the past 14 years, he was the office’s hiring lawyer.

The ABA Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division and the Section of State and Local Government Law offer discounted memberships and specialized resources for law students.

For more career and job search guidance, visit the ABA Career Counsel at www.abanet.org/careercounsel/students.html.
The Rewards of Government Employment

Although salaries are generally lower than in the private sector, lawyers with public agencies say they reap many benefits in their work.

by Katherine Mikkelson

(Katherine Mikkelson is associate director of the ABA Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division. Previously, she was a lawyer with the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Office of Special Counsel.)

When Joan Sullivan graduated from law school, paying down her law school loans was a priority, so she accepted a high-paying job right out of law school with a Washington, D.C., communications law firm. Within a few months of being there, Sullivan realized that the firm wasn't a good fit for her. "The work wasn't interesting or challenging," she recalls. "Also, it was difficult to get litigation work," which Sullivan was eager to try.

An eye-opening moment for Sullivan came when a more senior lawyer told her she wouldn't get to second-chair a deposition until she was at the firm for three or four years. "I didn't want to wait that long for the experience," she says. Sullivan applied for and got a position with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), where she interned during law school. It paid $20,000 less than her job with the firm.

It's true that government salaries generally are lower than what you'll find in the private sector, but government agencies tend to give their lawyers something many private firms, especially the larger ones, cannot: lots of experience, immediately.

Anne Dewey-Balzhiser, who recently started her own consulting firm after a 28-year career with five different federal agencies, recalls that she was with the Farm Credit Administration only four months when she was called to testify in Congress as a staffer about proposed legislation overhauling the Farm Credit Act.

"The federal government can't afford a long training period, so they throw you in and see how you do," says Dewey-Balzhiser, a council member of the ABA Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division. "There's a significant opportunity to develop skills and substantive knowledge quickly."

Likewise, within two months at the NLRB, Sullivan was the lead attorney on several cases and was conducting depositions with a limited amount of supervision. Within her first year there, she was the lead attorney in two trials.

"You won't get shunted off to do document review in the government," Sullivan says. But she also cautions that this particular attribute might not be for everyone: "If you don't like being pushed off with lots of responsibility from the start, [government work] might not be a good fit for you."

What drives lawyers who work for government agencies, many of whom leave private practice to do so? Aside from their desire to take lead responsibility on cases and other matters early in their careers, government lawyers also enjoy the public policy aspects of their work. And while salaries
may not be as high as in private practice, generous benefits (including loan repayment programs) and work-life accommodations can help make up the difference.

The federal government often is a model for discussing government legal work in general, but many opportunities exist in state and local government law as well. And think outside the prosecution box, as literally hundreds of agencies offer every type of practice area in every imaginable area of the law.

Salary
Most professional jobs in the federal government fall under the General Schedule (GS) pay scale. Jobs range from GS-1 to GS-15 (with 10 steps between each grade) and are ranked based on responsibility and difficulty of the work. Most entry-level lawyers start at either a GS-11 or GS-12, which ranges from $45,239 to $70,484 for 2005. In addition, certain areas of the country have locality pay adjustments to compensate for the higher cost of living in those areas. For example, in Los Angeles, federal employees earn 21.65 percent over the base pay.

Recognizing that some agencies have recruitment and retention problems, some agencies, such as the Securities and Exchange Commission, have separate pay scales for their employees. Also, assistant U.S. attorneys are not paid under the GS rate. They have an administratively determined pay plan established by the attorney general.

Entry-level salaries for state and local government vary depending on the jurisdiction, geographical area, and level of government. For example, in Prince William County, Va., assistant county attorneys begin at $52,000. Assistant attorneys general in Illinois begin at $43,000. In Coral Springs, Fla., assistant city attorneys start at $62,000.

By comparison, private practice salaries generally are higher—though often not as much as you might think. In 2004, according to the National Association for Law Placement, the average salary of a first-year associate in private practice was $95,000, but that figure accounts for firms of all sizes. First-year associates working for firms of two to 25 lawyers made an average starting salary of $65,000, while those at firms of more than 501 lawyers made an average of $120,000.

Benefits
Salary is one thing, but benefits also are important to take into account. Benefits with the federal government and many state and local agencies are considered generous. They include ample vacation time and sick leave, solid health and retirement benefits, and loan repayment programs.

Federal employees earn vacation time based on the amount of time in federal service. Employees employed between one and three years get 13 days of annual leave each year, while those employed between three and five years get 20 days. Federal employees with more than 15 years of service get 26 days a year. Up to 30 days of annual leave can be rolled over for future use. Each year, employees get 10 paid holidays and can earn up to 13 days of sick leave, which can be accumulated indefinitely.

Under new regulations effective at the beginning of 2005, federal employees can be granted compensatory time off (comp time) for time spent traveling away from the employee’s official duty station in certain situations. In addition, federal employees can receive life insurance and health coverage from a variety of plans, and the government pays a significant part of the premiums. Government lawyers also are eligible for the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), which includes Social Security as well as a separate retirement savings and investment plan.

Finally, there’s the federal government’s loan repayment program. Under 5 U.S.C. §5379, agencies may establish a program under which they may repay certain types of federally made, insured, or guaranteed student loans. The employee must remain in federal service for three
years. In 2003 (the last year for which data is available), 24 agencies provided $9.1 million in loan repayment benefits to 2,077 employees. Recent amendments to the law provide that a federal agency may repay up to $10,000 (up from $6,000) for any one employee in a calendar year and an aggregate limit of $60,000 (up from $40,000).

Aside from these benefits, what else attracts lawyers to government work?

Exceptional experience
Matthew Bye, an attorney-adviser for a commissioner at the Federal Trade Commission, found that he enjoyed the speaking engagements that were part of his job when he was with the Office of General Counsel, Policy Studies. Bye spoke at conferences and symposiums about the commission’s policies, reports, and recommendations and found that his monthly trips were a refreshing change of pace. “I got to talk with people in firms and industries who are on the cutting edge of issues,” says Bye, the young lawyers’ representative for the ABA Section of Antitrust Law. “It was great to talk to people in the field and not just be isolated in D.C.”

Government work also is noteworthy because lawyers can shape policy, something that rarely occurs in private practice. Joseph Manalili, a lawyer in the Airports and Environmental Law Division of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), conducts environmental reviews before major airport construction projects begin.

“The work I’m doing is important from a policy perspective because it affects citizens,” says Manalili, chair of the law student outreach committee of the ABA Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division.

Quality of life
An oft-cited benefit of being a government employee is the opportunity to achieve a reasonable work-life balance. Anne Dewey-Balzhiser had five periods of part-time employment throughout her career at various agencies. Childcare was the impetus for all her part-time stints.

Dewey-Balzhiser says her employers were surprisingly accommodating. She even found that the Farm Credit Administration was willing to create a part-time position for her when she wanted to scale back her hours after her third child was born.

Government lawyers are not beholden to the billable hour, so their time is much more likely to be their own. And while many jobs require long hours, especially for litigators, most government lawyers can manage their schedules more readily than their firm colleagues.

Just peruse the message boards at greedyassociates.com to learn how little vacation time is taken by associates, particularly those in large firms. Manalili notes that he took only one vacation day in one year when he was with a firm.

“My quality of life was not as good,” he says. “I worked longer hours and couldn’t plan for vacations or time off.” In his current position, Manalili appreciates the peace of mind that comes with going on vacation and not worrying about work.

The federal government also can be accommodating in terms of geographical and agency movement. Part of this flexibility is due to most agencies requiring a J.D. and being a member of the bar in good standing in any jurisdiction. Dewey-Balzhiser was with the Department of Treasury’s Comptroller of the Currency, located in Washington, D.C., when her husband, a lawyer in private practice, was offered a job in Dallas. She was able to negotiate a transfer to the department’s Dallas office, where she worked for more than two years before the couple returned to the Washington area.
Similarly, Manalili has found it easy to move from agency to agency. Besides his current position with the FAA, he's also worked for the Commission on Civil Rights, the Patent and Trademark Office, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, in geographic locations from Washington, D.C., to California.

"I've been able to move around from different agencies because of the easily transferable skills," he says. Despite the wildly divergent types of law he's practiced, from discrimination law to patent and trademark examination to environmental law, he notes that "the same skills keep coming up."

**Finding positions**

Government practice comes in all shapes and sizes. Salaries range considerably and application procedures differ from agency to agency and jurisdiction to jurisdiction, so do research beforehand to understand the agencies that are out there, what you are applying for, and how to apply.

Word of mouth can be a great way to find government positions, so keep your professional networks strong. Contact alumni of your college and law school who work for agencies you find interesting. Ask if they would be willing to sit down for an informational interview with you or recommend others who could.

To further expand your network of practicing lawyers, join professional associations and get involved in committees that sound interesting to you. You'll be surprised how receptive many of these groups are to have an eager law student willing to volunteer time.

Matthew Bye found his job through an ABA connection. While in law school at the Australian National University, he e-mailed the chair of the computer industry and Internet committee of the ABA Section of Antitrust Law for information about the application of antitrust law to business-to-business e-commerce for his thesis. About the same time, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) began studying the issue, holding hearings, and inviting public comment. Bye submitted his paper as a comment, and the commission cited portions of it in its report. After Bye graduated, he planned a trip to the United States, and his ABA contact put him in touch with several staffers in the policy studies office. Bye met with the staffers in person during a visit to Washington, D.C., and was offered a job soon thereafter.

Dewey-Balzhiser was creative in landing her first job with the FTC. During the summer after her second year of law school, she went through her school's alumni directory and wrote a letter to about 20 alumni who worked for various federal agencies. Almost all of them wrote or called her back. Several set up interviews for her in their agencies, including one with the FTC. The commission that year hired only a handful of lawyers out of hundreds of applicants, but Dewey-Balzhiser is sure her alumni contacts helped her stand out.

Some people see government practice as a steppingstone to more lucrative positions in private practice. But even if you plan on staying with the government a short time, don't announce this during the interview process; it can be considered an insult to lawyers who have devoted their careers to government service. And you never know, you might just wake up some day after years of service surprised to find that you are nearing retirement age.

Dewey-Balzhiser never expected she would retire from federal service. "I thought I would be there for two or three years," she says. She cites the difficulties of raising children if both she and her husband had been in private practice. "So by default I stayed in, and then I moved up," she says. "It was a very satisfying career."

**Federal Legal Opportunities Guide**
The ABA Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division, NALP, and the Partnership for Public
Service have produced the 2005-06 Federal Legal Employment Opportunities Guide. It contains information about obtaining a job with the federal government, including information on the application process, links to forms, alternative methods of entry into federal service, and salary and benefit information.

The guide is available for free download at www.governmentlawyer.org.

ABA Resources

Membership in the ABA Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division (www.governmentlawyer.org) is only $10 a year for law students and includes the Division’s quarterly newsletter, Pass It On, and biannual magazine, The Public Lawyer. Law student members also may log on to the Public Lawyer Career Center, a members-only benefit that provides access to employment and internship openings, links to public law offices, mentoring opportunities, and articles on career issues from Division periodicals. Law student members also can sign up for an e-mail discussion list, where they can ask and answer questions, seek advice, and receive updates on internship and job opportunities.

Students can join other ABA sections for free or at reduced rates and receive similar informational and networking benefits. ABA sections associated with government law include:

Section of Administrative Law and Regulatory Practice, www.abanet.org/adminlaw

Section of Antitrust Law, www.abanet.org/antitrust

Section of Criminal Justice, www.abanet.org/crimjust

Section of Environment, Energy, and Resources, www.abanet.org/environ

Section of Public Contract Law, www.abanet.org/contract

Section of Public Utility, Communications, and Transportation Law, www.abanet.org/pubutil

Section of State and Local Government Law, www.abanet.org/statelocal

Job Search Strategies

Many of the large government agencies participate in the fall or spring on-campus recruitment process, so if you’re interested in a particular agency, check with your career services office to see if representatives will be visiting your school. While this is a great place to start, don’t limit yourself solely to this resource.

Many agencies recruit year round or on an as-needed basis. A good place to check out vacancy announcements with the federal government is USAJobs (www.usajobs.opm.gov), a website run by the Office of Personnel Management that lists every government job open to candidates outside the government. Jobs for law students can be found at www.studentjobs.gov.

Several agencies, such as the Department of Justice and the FDIC, run honors programs, both of which set aside a certain number of openings each year for law graduates who have excelled academically. See www.usdoj.gov/oarm/arm/hp/hp.htm and www.fdic.gov/about/legalhonors for more information.
Nothing But Networking

As you plan your search for job and career, adopt "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" as your theme

If you're like most students, you probably have a fantasy about job searching. Here's how it goes: a position is advertised, you apply for it, the employer interviews you, and a job offer may or may not result. The process is neat and linear.

Time to wake up. That fantasy is pure fallacy. Although job postings and on-campus interviews have their place, most law students find employment through less-structured means. In fact, studies indicate that between 75 percent and 85 percent of all jobs are filled through word-of-mouth contacts and friendly connections—a process better known as networking.

Before you roll your eyes and sigh upon hearing this overused and often-misunderstood term, read on for ways you can deploy networking strategies with grace and success. By opening yourself to the concept and finessing its particulars, you'll develop a valuable tool for navigating your career path—now and throughout your professional life.

Perhaps you refuse to debase yourself by asking anyone for help, believing that doing so sullies the Horatio Alger myth of self-made success. If this is you, it may be time to change your tune, especially if your job prospects look bleak and you're contemplating yet another mass mailing of cover letters and résumés.

Instead, think of networking as a reciprocal arrangement of asking for and offering information. Consider John Donne's timeless words that "no man is an island." Recall the times in your life when you have offered someone advice, helped in an emergency, or provided emotional support and encouragement. Think of situations when you've been on the receiving end of such goodwill.

BY DONNA GERSON
Networking Dos and Don’ts

Before approaching a networking prospect:
- Approach networking as a process to gather information. Never ask for a job.
- Begin your correspondence with the connection you want to highlight (e.g., “So-and-so suggested I contact you.”).
- Whether you correspond by regular mail or e-mail, make sure your introductory message is concise and free of typos.
- Have a résumé available, but don’t furnish it with your initial correspondence or contact.

When you meet your networking prospect:
- Set the agenda and come prepared with questions intended to spur easy conversation. Don’t ambush your networking contact by turning the meeting into an adversarial interview.
- First impressions count. Ask about appropriate attire. If the office is in business casual mode, you should follow suit (and avoid a suit). Otherwise, dress in traditional office attire.
- Remain friendly, but not familiar. Do not feel that you are entitled to anything other than an information-gathering meeting.

After meeting your networking prospect:
- Be prompt with your thank-you letter and follow up with all subsequent contacts your networking prospect suggests. Your networking web will begin to expand quickly if you follow up on all leads.
- Keep your networking contact apprised of your progress. Holiday cards or other informal correspondence are appropriate ways to keep you in your contact’s thoughts. One good strategy is to clip relevant articles to send to contacts with a thoughtful note.
- Help others in need in the future. Think of networking as a give-and-take rather than a winner-take-all experience. Consider it a privilege to help another person achieve his or her dreams.
- Remember that you’re part of a circle of family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. Take pride in your achievements, but don’t forget that you have received assistance from others in your journey.

—Donna Gerson

To use a musical metaphor, forget “I did it my way” and think more along the lines of “We all need somebody to lean on.” Soon enough, you’ll hear of good job opportunities “through the grapevine.”

The first step in networking is figuring out what you want to learn. Simply asking someone for help finding a job is too vague and won’t yield the kind of information you need. So, begin by taking the time to hone your career goals a bit.

It’s not necessary to focus on a singular goal, but try to have some basic themes in mind, such as finding an associate position with a family law practice in town or learning about environmental law practice with a government agency. Decide what you think interests you and endeavor to learn more about it. Creating some geographic parameters also will help you focus your information-gathering process.

Next, find people to talk with about your interests. But, you say, “I don’t know any lawyers!” Not true. You are part of a tremendous network and you just don’t realize it. Talk to your professors about your interests and see if they have any suggestions. Visit your career services office and inquire about alumni who might have expertise in the subject areas that interest you. Many career services offices maintain databases containing the names of alumni interested in serving as mentors.

Another way to connect with practicing lawyers is to attend programs organized by your career services office. Last year, my office brought in more than 100 lawyers throughout the academic year for panel discussions and other educational programs. Many of these lawyers are alumni who want to help students. In addition, career services offices usually maintain ties with local bar associations, which are excellent sources of information for aspiring lawyers. Some bar associations offer student memberships entitled law students to attend meetings and other bar functions.

Take full advantage of your membership in the American Bar Association and the Law Student Division. Many of the ABA’s various practice-related sections and divisions offer mentoring and other information-sharing services through their web sites, publications, and meetings. For instance, a $10 student membership in the ABA Government and Public Sector Lawyers Division provides access to its e-mail mentoring service, where lawyers from various practice areas and settings are available to critique your résumé and answer general career questions. Other ABA section-oriented networking opportunities appear throughout every issue of Student Lawyer.

Let your classmates know of your intentions as well. They may have more connections than you think. For example,

Student Lawyer Jobs columnist Donna Gerson recently left her position after seven years as director of career planning at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law to write on legal career issues full time. You can reach her at gerson@law.pitt.edu.
many law clerk positions at smaller firms are treated like in-heritances and passed down from student to student. In fact, at some firms, the current law clerks are charged with helping to fill an upcoming vacancy with someone they know. The more classmates who know you’re looking, the likelier you are to get a friendly nod when a position opens. Moreover, while you might not come from a family of lawyers, some of your classmates may. I recall one student whose father, a high-ranking government attorney, helped several classmates find law clerk positions at his office for the summer.

Outside law school, talk to neighbors, friends, former employers, and family members about your goals, even if they’re not lawyers. One student whose father paints houses for a living helped his son with much-needed legal contacts in the community because of a recent painting contract he secured with a prominent lawyer in town. The contact resulted in a part-time summer job for the son. Another student, frustrated with his independent job search, finally spoke to his uncle, a small-business owner. The uncle, it turns out, was friendly with a federal judge in another city, and this connection resulted in a summer clerkship. Had the student suffered in silence, his uncle never would have been able to offer his help.

The Internet is the newest way to connect with practitioners and other law students. "The value of the Internet as a networking resource for law students is best summed up in the most fundamental definition of the Internet itself: The Internet is a network of networks," notes John J. Sanchez, founder of JDpost (www.jdpost.com), a web resource for law students nationwide. Sanchez, a third-year student at the University of California-Hastings College of Law in San Francisco, sees JDpost as a resource for networking on topics from summer housing and sublets to law student polls and message boards for trading notes on employers.

In addition to investigating law-related web services, look into whether your undergraduate college offers any Internet-based networking services to reach fellow alumni. Searches using Martindale-Hubbell’s national database of
As Bush and Gore Debate, a Student Works the Crowd

by Tom R. Arterburn

When the Commission on Presidential Debates selected Washington University in St. Louis as the site for its final debate last fall, some folks wasted no time strategizing on how to advance their career interests. When even a longtime Washington insider like Ralph Nader gets turned away, you know you’re going up against a tough crowd. For most, getting past the debate gatekeepers required top-level VIP status and a thorough security check at the door.

But that didn’t stop Josh Rubenstein, a Washington University senior interested in a career in politics. The 22-year-old demonstrated some keen networking strategies as he made it past the Secret Service.

“I think the debate is an excellent opportunity, not to distribute résumés, because that’s really not what the people are here for, but to at least meet them, express some interest, and maybe get some names of people to follow up with,” he said at the event.

Rubenstein got his foot in the door by volunteering as a sponsor, or VIP escort, which had him shuttling governors and members of Congress from the Ritz Carlton a few miles away to the debate site on campus.

Knowing he would be interacting with some of the country’s fastest movers and talkers, Rubenstein decided on a simple strategy: “Introducing myself, and letting them know I have an interest in politics,” he said.

To bolster any discussions he would have, Rubenstein came prepared. “I follow politics pretty closely, so I know something about the people [attending the debate] and their backgrounds,” he said. “I can then engage them in a meaningful and memorable conversation.

“If you can show an interest in what they do and what they’re trying to accomplish, you will stand out from the people who just want to hand them a résumé and say, ‘Hire me,’” he said.

Other strategies that can help turn an event—political or otherwise—into a career booster are:

• Persistence. It’s not easy to plead your case as a parade of the appointed file past you into an event, but as you socialize more and more, you could be surprised how quickly someone might come along and utter those magic words: “He’s OK, he’s with me.”

• Luck. Like a lightning strike, good luck never happens in the same place twice, so keep moving. Consider the case of a reporter who needed an interview on a topic nobody was discussing at the debate: the protests outside. A key contact turned up out of the blue when a police source he hadn’t talked to in two years pulled up a chair next to him in the hospitality tent outside.

• Cracking the dress code. I arrived a day prior to the debate to scout the location and the people, but I stuck out in my white button down and wingtips as event organizers and media members strolled around in khakis and polo shirts. My discomfort grew the following day when I ended up in the fourth row of the media filing center donning a golf pullover in a sea of suits and ties, as TV cameras from all over the world panned back and forth in front of me.

• Research. A simple trip to the C-Span video library, available online, would have prevented the aforementioned foible.

• Restraint. If you’re tempted to oversell your qualifications or blast a newfound contact with daily e-mailed résumés, consider a huge mistake our presidential candidates made when they sent interns scurrying into the media center every minute of the debate with spin-doctored news releases highlighting or rebutting earlier statements. Reuters political correspondent Alan Elsner said it best as page after page piled up around his laptop: “Enough is enough.”

Tom R. Arterburn is an independent job-search journalist based in St. Louis.
by a student,” says Cynthia Wyatt, director of career services at New York Law School. Wyatt’s office maintains a database of more than 400 alumni who volunteer as mentors.

Make networking connections by telephone, letter, e-mail, or in person. You should choose the method that suits you best. Correspondence by letter or e-mail probably is the most convenient mode because it allows the recipient to choose the time of reply and avoids the possibility of interrupting someone at an inconvenient time. Keep your correspondence short and to the point. Introduce yourself and state your connection immediately. Describe your interests and offer the recipient the chance to contact you. Avoid enclosing résumés or any other materials that might smack of asking for a job in your initial contact. For example:

Professor Richard Burton suggested I contact you regarding my interest in environmental law. After I shared my enthusiasm for pursuing a career as an environmental lawyer, Professor Burton thought you would be able to offer some advice about how to proceed with my career. Last summer, I clerked for the Department of Environmental Protection and realized that this practice area was especially meaningful to me.

I realize that you are busy, but I would appreciate the chance to speak with you briefly in person or by telephone to learn more about your practice. I can be reached at _______________ or via e-mail at _______________. Thank you in advance for your time and assistance. I look forward to speaking with you about your work.

If you choose to telephone your contact, be direct. Begin by stating, “Professor John Smith, who taught my first-year torts class, suggested I give you a call. Is this a good time to talk?” If you reach someone’s voice mail, leave a brief message and be sure to give clear directions for reaching you.

As with all job search efforts, be prepared for some rejection along the way. A few promising networking contacts may turn out to be duds. Anticipate that some won’t return your phone calls or e-mails; others may be abrupt or dismissive. Be charitable toward these individuals by keeping in mind that they might merely be busy and aren’t necessarily intending to be rude.

Whatever you do, always remember that by casting your net widely, you’ll also find some true gems. The trick is to pursue your contacts tactfully and acknowledge that you’ll run into some dead ends despite your best efforts. Learning how to take risks and deal with rejection as you develop professional contacts is a valuable side benefit to the networking process.

When you meet with a networking contact, come prepared with an agenda. First and foremost, you are gathering information from an expert source.
Consider asking questions like:

- What made you decide to practice family law?
- What aspect of your work do you enjoy the most? (It's awkward and rude to ask someone which aspect of work he or she enjoys least.)
- What kinds of skills do you think family lawyers should cultivate?
- What advice do you have for courses I should take next semester?
- What kinds of job prospects exist for entry-level family lawyers in this market?
- How can I distinguish myself in this job market?
- Do you recommend anyone else I should contact for further information?

Listen carefully to what your contact says. Remember to converse, not interrogate. Your goal is to leave a networking meeting with a better understanding of what you want to do and how to achieve your goals. If your contact offers names of others to speak with, ask permission to use the contact’s name in subsequent correspondence.

After the conversation, be sure to write a thank-you letter promptly. Give thanks and, if other contacts were suggested, remind the reader you’ll be following up. For example:

*Thank you again for taking the time to share your experiences as a family lawyer. I appreciate your candor and admire the enthusiasm you have for your work. Per your suggestion, I will register for Advanced Gift Tax with Professor Jones. I hope this will improve my marketability with area firms. Also, I have written to James Marx at Marx, Jacobs & Fein to inquire about a law clerk position. I will keep you apprised of my progress and appreciate all your help. It means a great deal to me that you would take the time to help me.*

Networking is, in essence, a give-and-take, not the take-and-take that some people believe. It is an opportunity to share information, learn from an expert, and create further contacts. Compared to the sterile process of responding to a job posting, networking is full of serendipitous potential. A job seeker who networks can distinguish himself or herself from the pack by being the only person contacting an individual, as opposed to one of hundreds of respondents to a posting.

Think about “Six Degrees of Separation” and the concept that you’re only a short distance away from the person who can help connect you to the job of your dreams. It’s much more comforting than putting your career fate in the hands of an anonymous lawyer sorting through hundreds of résumés.

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