



The SciTech Edge: **Insights from ABA SciTech Section Leaders** *for law students and young lawyers*

TOPIC: How to Get the Job and Grow Your Practice

Approach the Job Search Like a Job

- **Before making the first move on a job search, spend some time thinking about what you want from your career.** By doing so, you will be creating a personalized measuring stick against which you can compare opportunities that come your way.
- **Set aside a certain amount of time each week to look for a job.** Get help from your school's placement and career development office, relevant websites, and legal blogs.
- **Use tools** available to you (e.g., Internet search engines, law firm/lawyer directories, job search sites, etc.) to find firms that include practice areas in which you are interested and are located in cities where you want to work.
- **Develop a hook** that will distinguish you from other job applicants. The marketplace is very competitive. Perhaps you are fluent in a foreign language – look for U.S. firms that have offices where that language is spoken. Perhaps you have some life experience that will enhance your ability to understand your future clients. Or perhaps you've served as the law student liaison for an ABA committee.
- **Perform** as well as you possibly can in school and during your legal internships; write for a journal.
- **Don't choose a firm based on quoted first-year starting salaries or "profits per partner."** Obviously, some firms pay more than others. These figures won't necessarily tell you what you will be paid over the course of years. In any case, salary should not be the primary (or only) criterion for selecting the firm where you will spend many of your waking hours over the years to come.
- **Write simply and clearly to succeed.** Plain writing, as much as specific legal expertise, delivers value to clients and employers. Aim for short, declarative sentences; good grammar; and minimal (or no) legalese. Always make sure you've thoroughly proofed whatever you send to others (and use spell-check); what you write reflects on you and your perceived abilities in the eyes of others.

Be Prepared: The Interview

- Find out whatever you can about the **firm** or **organization** with which you'll be interviewing and (if possible) the **attorneys** with whom you'll be meeting. Spend some time doing searches on Lexis or Westlaw, and Internet search engines, in addition to your prospective employer's website. Look for articles written by those attorneys or cases they've tried. Use this information to tailor your responses to questions and as a good platform for asking your own.
- When you go to an interview, **show genuine enthusiasm** and passion for the law career ahead of you.
- **Stay flexible**, and consider interviewing with firms that will allow you to handle a diverse, hands-on range of SciTech interests. Take a chance and admit what you want to do. If you don't have a particular area in which you are interested, don't pretend that there is. You might be guessing wrong.
- If you have special **scientific, technology, or legal expertise**, **talk** about it to distinguish yourself from other job candidates. Keep in mind, though, that employers first and foremost are looking for great lawyers, not a computer programmer who happens to be a lawyer.
- In an interview with a law firm partner, **do not ask about the firm's "minimum hours' requirements."** It can send the wrong message (e.g., that you see the position as a job rather than a career). Ask junior associates or HR personnel instead.
- **Heed your instincts.** If you are lucky enough to have more than one job offer, don't just compare factors such as money, prestige, mentoring, and advancement opportunities. Often, we consciously try to talk ourselves into a decision, when all along our instincts knew it wasn't the right choice for us.
- If a firm turns you down, **do not abrasively contact the firm's lawyers to demand to know why**, or to ask if you can have another chance. Law firms turn down law students and junior lawyers for all sorts of reasons, many of which have little to do with the candidate personally. Even if a firm turns you down, you

may very well apply there in the future, and having been declined the first time may not be an obstacle. But engaging in negative behavior will probably ensure that you do not have a chance in the future.

Network: It's Sometimes Who You Know

- **Join bar associations** (specialty bars, state bars, and the ABA and its Sections) and professional organizations in your area(s) of interest. Volunteer to **organize programs, edit newsletters, participate in committees**, or assist in ways that will provide opportunities to meet other SciTech enthusiasts and become known to potential employers. Some organizations will have programs for law students/young lawyers already established; if not, suggest they start one. In particular, get active in **the ABA Section of Science & Technology Law**, which puts the latest innovations and major players at your fingertips.
- Offer to **write an article** (understanding that you will have a byline) with/for an up-and-coming legal expert in your area to establish name recognition and credibility. Then send your published article to prospective employers.
- **Work in internships** (paid or volunteer) in your area of interest. This is a great way to gain experience and develop important contacts that you will need to get and do a paid job.
- **Contact alumni** of colleges/universities or other organizations with whom you or your family are associated. Become active and attend alumni events to meet people.
- **Build your network and stay in touch.** Keep up with the people in your network, and be genuinely curious about their experiences and perspectives. People love to talk about themselves (schedules permitting), and what you learn could inform all sorts of future decisions. Your contacts can help you change jobs or careers, bring in new business, or track down information and resources you need; over time, you can return the favor.

Develop Perspective: You'll See Further

- **Develop a niche expertise.** Your niche doesn't have to be technical, although it could be. Find an aspect of a practice area for which you can become the firm's "go to" person.
- Read **science and technology articles** (such as in *The SciTech Lawyer*, the quarterly magazine of the Section of Science & Technology Law) and contact authors of the articles. Cutting-edge scientific and technical knowledge is imperative to success.
- **Research conferences** and contact speakers about presentations in which you are interested.
- **Prepare, prepare, prepare... and then go with the flow.** It's appealing to think that if you just create the right career plan and then follow that plan, everything will work out just right. And it might. Then again, you could be presented with opportunities you never dreamed of – be open to those.
- Change is the only constant in a SciTech practice. Adopt a **life-long learning plan**, and demonstrate an appetite for learning beyond the law.
- The **first law firm job you get is unlikely to be your last.** As a junior associate, your job is to learn your profession and be trained. For your first job, choose a firm where you will find the work you want and mentors to help you.

This SciTech Edge column was compiled and edited by Ruth Hill Bro and Julia Gillespie. Bro is Chair-Elect of the ABA Section of Science & Technology Law, and Chair of the Section's Committee for the Advancement of Science and Technology Law and Education (CASTLE). Julia Gillespie is Section Membership and Committees Manager. They would like to thank Section leaders Steven Brower, Pamela Deese, Eric Drogin, Julie Fleming-Brown, Stephen Goodman, Christine Grant, Eileen Smith Ewing, Melissa Ince, Heather Meeker, Shiv Naimplally, Kimberly Kiefer Peretti, Tom Smedinghoff, Lucy Thomson, and Hugh Wellons for their invaluable contributions to this article. If you have any comments or suggestions for future SciTech Edge topics, please contact Ruth Hill Bro (bro@bakernet.com; 312-861-7985) or Julia Gillespie (gillespj@staff.abanet.org; 312-988-5594).

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