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Bar Exam and Beyond: 11 Strategies for Law School Graduate Success
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I have worked with law and pre-law students for over a decade in a variety of roles including administrative roles at three different law schools, and I served as the executive director of a nonprofit dedicated to supporting and advancing law students of color. While in these roles, I learned valuable lessons, which led to the advice that I am providing here for recent law school graduates and students who are about to graduate law school. In my current role as a speaker, consultant, and executive coach, I also share many of these lessons with experienced attorneys as they progress in their legal careers.

1. **Connect with your network online now!** I encourage those of you who are still in law school to make strategic connections with your classmates, faculty, and alumni using LinkedIn. Staying abreast of their career trajectories will better enable them to stay connected with you and invested in your career.

2. **Assess and build your brand.** Recent graduates should work with law school career services office to develop a strategic plan for building a professional brand after graduation. This process should include assessments of skills and areas where improvement is needed. Reviewing any deficits in your current brand allows you to take a snapshot, set a goal for where you would like to be, and hold yourself accountable as you progress in your career. On future review, you will be able to see how far you have come and what you still need to accomplish.

3. **Know that gratitude goes a long way.** On your way out of law school and into the legal profession, it is important to reflect on the people who helped you on your journey to and through law school. These people can continue to be a resource as you launch your legal career, so take the time to thank law school administrators, professors, mentors, and other supporters who were instrumental to you on your journey.

4. **Finish up strong.** As you near the end of your law school career it is important to finish with as much energy and enthusiasm as you had when you were a 1L. While the rigor of law school is challenging, many students tend to wane in their efforts as they near graduation and this is a mistake. The attitudes, effort, and perceptions that you embody as you close this chapter of your life will shape how you move to the next phase—the bar exam.

5. **Celebrate after the bar exam.** Many students decide to celebrate graduation with trip before the bar exam. If you are taking the bar exam right after graduation, I strongly advise you to transition immediately into bar study rather than take a break. Bar exam prep and passage should be your utmost priority upon graduation. Passing the exam,
whether you currently have a job offer or not, should be viewed as the final step in your law school career. Having bar passage as a credential (hopefully achieved on your first try) will enable you to begin your career as an attorney without any remaining barriers.

6. **Learn bar exam success strategies.** What I have learned from personal experience and from supporting hundreds of law students during study for their bar exams is that success on the bar requires two very important things: (1) Deep commitment to using the tools and following the processes recommended by your chosen bar exam test prep course and (2) disengagement from all things that don’t serve you on your path to passing the bar including demanding friends and family and social media.

7. **Commit to learning (excellence).** Oftentimes, when beginning a new role, junior attorneys struggle to find the balance between the education they have received and the practical experience that they require. My suggestion on how to best navigate this issue in the workplace is to lead with humility and understand that there is much to learn. You should endeavor to learn from more experienced colleagues, to increase your skills and to accomplish tasks well. This strategy can help lessen workplace perceptions of you having an inflated ego or lack of ability and will encourage others to mentor and support you as you grow as an attorney.

8. **Don’t be afraid to ask for help.** A combination of fear and ego tends to prevent recent graduates from asking for help when needed. I recommend that new graduates lead with humility and understand that the vulnerability required to ask for assistance, whether it be on how to correctly complete a task or how to access their network for job opportunities is not an indicator of weakness or lack of ability. On the contrary, asking for help and knowing that you need to tap into resources in areas where you are not as strong is a core leadership competency.

9. **Engage, volunteer, lead.** As you emerge into the profession, one way to deepen your learning and your network is to join bar associations and volunteer on a committee. This will provide you with access to a network of experienced practitioners who can be potential mentors, sponsors, employers or eventual clients.

10. **Be humble but ambitious.** While leading with humility is my recommendation, this does not mean that you should be invisible or silent as you progress in your career. In fact, I encourage recent graduates to be ambitious. Your ambitions should align with the goals set out in your professional brand strategic plan. The tasks you are trying to accomplish should not seem easy at the outset. In fact, they should be challenging in order to ensure that you continue to grow, learn and ultimately become a better attorney. This is why I remind students and attorneys of my business tag line, “Engage Your Hustle.”

11. **Engage Your Hustle.** The next steps in your career may at times appear daunting. Understand that a primary key to success will be your ability to harness and maximize the
power within you that comes from reflecting on why you started on this path to becoming an attorney. Celebrate your accomplishments; remember and learn from the challenges you have overcome. Finally, prepare for the road ahead, stay focused, and meet (and exceed) your career goals. Congratulations on what you have accomplished thus far, and welcome to the profession!

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Q&A with San Diego County District Attorney Candidate Geneviéve Jones-Wright

By Hali M. Anderson

Geneviéve Jones-Wright is a 12-year deputy public defender and native San Diegan who is running for district attorney of San Diego County. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Media Communication from the University of San Francisco, a Juris Doctorate from Howard University School of Law, and a Master of Laws in Trial Advocacy from California Western School of Law. Beyond the courtroom, Jones-Wright serves on the City of San Diego’s Commission on Gang Prevention and Intervention where she chairs the ad-hoc gang documentation committee. She is also a volunteer attorney for the California Innocence Project and is an appointed member of the State Bar of California's Council on Access and Fairness.

Additionally, Jones-Wright is an active member of the San Diego community at large. She currently serves on the board of directors for the David’s Harp Foundation, a local nonprofit that transforms the lives of “at-risk” and homeless youth through the power of music. She is a mock trial team coach and a member of the criminal justice program advisory board at Lincoln High School. In 2003, Geneviéve cofounded and served on the board of directors of ELITE (Educated Ladies Investing in Tomorrow’s Exemplars), a local program that prepared young girls for college.

Recently, Jones-Wright sat down with Hali M. Anderson, senior associate at Wilson Turner Kosmo, to discuss her campaign, her vision for San Diego, and to let us know what she likes to do in her down time.

When did you first decide to run for district attorney?
The day of the Women’s March (2017). I was part of San Diego Leadership Alliance (SDLA), which is a progressive leadership program, and that was the first day of class. We were all sharing our passions and everything I mentioned was centered around changing the criminal justice system. One of the questions we were asked was what a day in the life of our dream job would be like and it hit me. I decided to stop running from it. I went home and I consulted God, my husband, and my pastor. After that, I knew that this was what I was meant to do.

Can you tell me a little bit about your campaign team?
My campaign manager is a 22-year old female millennial. In fact, my entire team is millennials. I am a firm believer in assisting the next generation of leaders and creating a pipeline to leadership. Millennials and younger generations understand that not only is change possible, but it’s necessary. We need to re-shape our justice system and they get it. In addition to my campaign manager, my entire core team is made up of women. My campaign consultant, my event coordinator, my treasurer, and my community outreach director are all women. More importantly, they are women who stand with and for women. Women who are leaders and future
elected officials themselves. I always want to “walk the walk and talk the talk” and that starts with my team.

**What has been the most difficult part about campaigning?**
Working full-time and campaigning at the same time. I can only campaign in my off-hours, and San Diego is a massive county. I need to make sure that every resident knows my name, my face, and my message. I’m also in the process of planning my wedding celebration! When my husband and I got married, we had a very small, intimate celebration, but now, we are having the big celebration. I am loving my life, but it is busy!

**What is a day in your life of campaigning like?**
For me, my week starts on Sunday. I have 6:00 a.m. Bible study with my best friends from college, then attend Sunday worship service. After service, I go and spend time with my 93-year-old great uncle. We play dominos and talk. Sometimes, I take him to get pedicures. From 6:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.—this is my “Do Not Interfere Time.” I then try to have Sunday dinner with my husband who just arrived home after a 2-year deployment in Okinawa.

**You knew campaigning for the district attorney position as a public defender was going to be tough. Have you encountered any obstacles you did not expect?**
Not really. I have expected the nonsense that unfortunately comes with politics. But, maybe not the extent of the nonsense. For example, before I was in the running to be district attorney, there was an incident where I was racially profiled. I was on my way home from a memorial service for my colleague and I was pulled over, handcuffed at gunpoint, and my car was searched with drug dogs—all because the police believed my license plates did not belong to my car. They did, of course. And it all could have been settled by retrieving my car registration from the glove compartment where I told them it was located. Mind you, the license plate was not reported stolen, nor was the make or model of my car. This should have been a routine traffic stop (“License, registration, and insurance, ma’am?” No guns. No dogs.) During my campaign, this incident has been brought up by my opposition as an example of why I am not fit to be district attorney. That’s right—me being racially profiled is being used against me. They have taken to Twitter, posting screenshots showing me being pulled over. The fact that people are using this dehumanizing and unjust experience to try to prove that I cannot be a district attorney is appalling. This incident makes me even more qualified, as I have a personal understanding of the failures and injustices of our justice system.

**If/when you are elected district attorney, what are your primary objectives?**
Reduce incarceration numbers in county jails and state prisons. We cannot incarcerate our way out of problems. In order to do that, I think we need to do the following:

- Change the narrative that jails are mental health facilities and the answer to our homelessness crisis.
- End the school-to-prison pipeline.
Focus on restorative practices and trauma-informed solutions in our justice system, our education system, our foster care system, and in our healthcare systems.

**What do you mean when you say “restorative practices”? How does this fit into the criminal justice system?**

With restorative practices, we change the question from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” We focus on understanding on how to fix the issue. The knee-jerk reaction is to say, “I don’t care why this offender did it, I want that person in jail.” Incarceration does not work to fix problems and prevent them from happening again. Restorative practices focus on the reality that when a crime is committed, not only is the victim impacted, but also the offender and the community. Those three parties need to be involved in repairing the harm. The person harmed tells the offender how the harm has affected his/her life. The responsible party listens and communicates with the person harmed. The community shares the impact of the harm, and all involved share in the solution.

San Diego Unified declared itself a restorative school district and San Diego should be both a restorative city and county. But restorative practices in our justice system are nowhere near as expansive as they should be. Certain individuals and crimes are kept out of restorative justice programs, and this should not be the case. There is a time and space for restorative practices at all junctures of a case and for all types of crimes. It can be effective before sentencing or several years later, and perhaps it can be beneficial for an individual’s parole hearing. When it occurs, it is a transformative experience. Why restrict it to only certain crimes if we are really trying to fix problems?

**What advice do you have for a young deputy district attorney?**

One of the biggest things that differentiates me from my opponent is that I think that deputy district attorneys need to be trusted with the power of discretion a lot more. Obviously, deputy district attorneys have less experience than their supervisors, but they are the ones on the ground. They are the ones that know the cases best, have spoken with the witnesses and victims, and know firsthand how the evidence played out in court. They know what is different about each case. So, to the younger deputy district attorneys, I say: Keep pushing for justice. Make sure you are heard in your meetings with your superiors. And if a supervisor tells you do something you feel is at odds with the law or your ethical duty as a prosecutor, never compromise your oath or integrity. Justice is not about winning or losing—ever.

**What are your hobbies?**

Cooking. Whatever ingredients there are, I can make something! I don’t do recipes. I cook from the heart. And travel. I love traveling anywhere, but my true love is Mexico. I’ve been all over Mexico and visited all the beaches. I lived in Mexico City for two years. From Baja to Chiapas, I love everything about Mexico.
Any final words?
It’s time for a change. We need a change in leadership and a different mentality in the criminal justice system. And that is what I stand for: much-needed change.

Hali M. Anderson is with Wilson Turner Kosmo LLP in San Diego, California.
How to find the right mentor—especially if you are a female or minority lawyer

By Stephanie Francis Ward

Finding the right mentor can be tricky—especially for female and minority lawyers.

A Thursday afternoon panel discussion at ABA Techshow explored several ways for women and attorneys of color to find the right mentor. The panel, titled “Mentoring Women and People of Color in Legal Tech,” was moderated by Irene Mo, a NextGen fellow at the ABA Center for Innovation and a 2017 graduate of Michigan State University College of Law.

If you are interested in having someone as a mentor, maybe you shouldn’t ask them outright, said Tiffany Graves. “The best approach might be to say, ‘I’ve been watching you, I like what I see, and this is how I’d like to shape my career. Can we grab a cup of coffee?’” said Graves, the pro bono counsel at Bradley Arant Boult & Cummings, who recently served as executive director of the state’s access to justice commission.

Another way to find a mentor is to reach out to someone whose work you admire. Tell him or her what you want out of your career and ask for help identifying various people who might be interested in assisting you, said panelist Judy Perry Martinez, who is of counsel with Simon, Peragine, Smith & Redfearn and special advisor to the ABA Center for Innovation. Martinez, who was selected as ABA president-elect nominee in February, agreed that it can be difficult for a potential mentee to approach an individual and ask him or her to be a mentor. Instead, she suggested that lawyers in search of a mentor ask colleagues or peers for suggestions. If they agree that a certain person would make a good mentor, then maybe they can even make an introduction. “Mentoring is a privilege and obligation,” Martinez told the ABA Journal. “As a professional in any profession, you need to figure out how to contribute and be a mentor.”

Mo, the moderator, told the audience that she’s had success meeting people at conferences, following their Twitter feeds and reaching out when a tweet interests her. That can take a relationship beyond meeting someone at a conference, Mo said, and help determine if someone would be the right person to mentor you. If it does seem like a good fit, she will ask the person for coffee.

“Once I see that they are invested in me, and they respond to my emails, I say, ‘You are my mentor, even if you don’t realize it,’ ” said Mo.

And much like the other panelists who are in positions to be mentors, Mo, as a potential mentee, said that it can be uncomfortable when someone you don’t know says that they want to mentor you.
“If it’s someone I don’t know, I always question why is this person being nice to me,” she said.

“That’s the elephant in the room. Half of being a good mentor is not being a jerk. It takes listening more than talking and an approach that’s more nuanced. When you’re walking up to someone who doesn’t look or act or talk like you, or run in the same circles as you, there should be a little suspicion,” said another panelist, Chas Rampenthal, who is LegalZoom’s general counsel. He said that he sees a lot of people getting recognition in legal tech who, like himself, are white men. Considering that, he’s interested in mentoring people who have different life experiences and are seeking a career similar to his.

Dan Lear, another panelist, said that he preferred informal mentor-like relationships, rather than programs sponsored by employers.

“People just come out of the woodwork and tell me a compelling enough story, that makes me want to invest in them,” said Lear, director of industry relations with Avvo. “You can say, ‘I want to be invested in you and how your grow because there’s something here that makes me feel good.’ ”

Martinez cautioned that some people don’t know how to be good mentors, which is why formal programs are helpful.

“There’s a real skill set that can be developed as a mentor, and in a formal program there are opportunities to learn, and it also checks on the system,” she said, adding that sometimes there’s a power dynamic in mentor relationships that makes people uncomfortable. And sometimes, neither mentors nor mentees understand boundaries in the relationships. She also told the audience that when she mentors someone, she often gets just as much, if not more, out of the relationship than the other person.

“It’s an absolutely ongoing, constant flow of ideas and information. They have different ways of looking at the same social challenges we’ve been looking at for decades, as lawyers,” Martinez said. “Not only am I mentoring them on things I’m familiar with, the flow to me has been tremendously powerful and rich.”
Who Makes the Best Mentors for Female Associates?

By Holly J. Clemente

Lawyers face a myriad of difficulties when starting their careers—learning the many differences between law school and a law firm, juggling new clients, working with a secretary. Juggling all this while simultaneously learning to deal with office politics can be overwhelming; and while the process can be a struggle for any fresh associate, it can prove especially difficult for young women just entering the firm environment.

It may be possible to climb the corporate ladder on your own but having the support and the ear of a mentor, someone who is already where you wish to be, can make all the difference. According to Susan Black, vice president of Catalyst in Canada, “A mentor can be the person who helps you figure out how to get what you want, whether that is a strategy to go after the right assignments that will lead to a promotion or negotiating a flexible schedule.” Choosing the right mentors and convincing them to choose you is vital to your career. A good mentor can point you in the right direction, show you the big picture, point out where you could stand to improve, and highlight the areas where you are doing well.

A new associate can also tap into her mentor’s already-established network. The mentor can provide a protégé with the kind of work assignments that get noticed; assignments that a new associate might not otherwise get a chance to undertake. Former ABA President Robert J. Grey (2004–2005) noted that the most crucial ingredient for career advancement is social capital, something that having the right mentor can increase considerably.

But having a mentor is not only about what you can gain it is also about what you can provide. As in any healthy association, both parties must feel as if they are benefiting from the relationship. If you think that you may be demanding too much from your mentor, try to find ways you can contribute to the relationship. It does not have to be much, but it needs to be meaningful. Perhaps you can share your network with your mentor. If this leads to a paying client, your mentor is likely to remember it and will be much more eager to assist the next time you have a problem. Or perhaps you pride yourself on staying abreast of the newest technology. If you are a good deal younger than your mentor and more familiar with all the latest gizmos, your mentor may really appreciate your insights into the newest functions of these devices—especially if they can simplify life in some way.

Do your best to refrain from intruding too often on your mentor’s time. Remember that you sought out your mentor largely because he or she is successful, which likely means that your mentor is busy. You do not want to be thought of as a burden. Many mentors have set times when they will work with mentees, while others tend to enjoy a more relaxed approach. Find out your mentor’s preferences and abide by them.

I should say something here on the topic of confidentiality. The importance of keeping quiet cannot be overstressed. If you are going to work in a law firm, it is mandatory to learn that there are things you discuss with others and things you do not. If your mentor believes you have a big mouth, then he or she is not going to share things with you, and the relationship will suffer significantly. Likewise, if you are unable to trust your mentor to refrain from telling the whole office every time you voice a concern, the
relationship will not endure. Any uncertainties you may have regarding what is open to discussion and what is off limits should be discussed with your mentor before any problems arise.

Mentors are of particular importance for female associates. Despite advances in reducing workplace gender discrimination over the last few decades, there remains an unfortunate discrepancy between men and women in partnership positions at law firms across the nation. Although law schools are graduating classes that are nearly perfectly split between men and women, something is happening to the female graduates as they begin their climb into the upper tiers of the profession. While women make up 45 percent of associates, the number drops significantly when they reach partners—fewer than 20 percent of partners are women. Within five years of entering a firm, 75 percent of associates make the decision to leave. Of those who leave, women are twice as likely to leave than men. The same problem can be seen in law schools. While 66 percent of assistant deans are female, only 20 percent of deans are female. What is causing women to leave the law at such alarming rates? And for those who remain, why are they not reaching partnership on an equal pace as their male peers? According to the statistics, many women are leaving right around the time they are approaching partnership consideration, which is also the time that a firm’s investment in them is beginning to pay off.

Why are so many women leaving the profession? While many certainly leave to spend more time with their families, far too many claim that they felt pushed into leaving. Many women would prefer to keep their careers and family but believe the current structure of law firms does not support this decision. Only a small number of female associates leave to start families. Most women leave for other careers or to practice law in a different way—starting a solo practice, for example.

A good mentor can provide a necessary boost to a young woman’s career and no doubt help reverse this disturbing trend, but it is also important that new female associates take an active role in seeking out other women to mentor them. Social Identity Theory tells us that people tend to feel connected to those who share certain common traits with them. In other words, men will generally be more comfortable around other men, and women around other women. Female associates should be mindful of this when choosing a mentor.

Few question that the law remains a “man’s world.” It may be difficult for male attorneys to truly appreciate the hurdles their female coworkers face on a daily basis. Having another woman whom you can confide in—one who has very likely already faced and overcome many of the same challenges and concerns you currently face—has enormous potential to simplify your life.

Another benefit of same-gendered mentors is the all-important “off-time” that you are able to spend together. A man may fear that his coworkers will get the wrong impression, and he may be uncomfortable spending time after work on the golf course or at a bar with a young female associate; but a female mentor may feel less pressure in such scenarios.

Many female associates believe they should have a male mentor because he will be in a better position to facilitate their career objectives. This argument may have some force, but if a strong relationship between the mentor and mentee is lacking there will be limited benefit to the relationship, regardless of their genders.

A mentor can be helpful to your career and female mentors in particular may be able to provide insights that a male mentor can not. Put a little effort into choosing your mentor and remember that the first person
who comes to mind might not necessarily be your best choice. The results can make all the difference in your new career.

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