



## “How to Get a Permanent Position Following Graduation if You did not get Legal Experience During Law School”

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Choosing not to work for a firm or clerk for a court during law school is not always the best career move. Most law students find that getting good summer jobs increases their chance of finding a position after graduation. Using Legal Authority, hundreds of law students get summer positions each year. Graduating without work experience will require an aggressive job search and careful marketing.

Some attorneys go to law school with no intention of practicing law. The fact that you have not worked during law school indicates to employers that you may not have had a strong interest in the practice of law. We are going to assume, however, that at this point you want to get a position in the best law firm possible.

It is certainly common for students coming from top law schools to work in a law-related position during the summers in law school. This is especially true of a law student's second summer. Law firms hire summer associates because they want to get a sense of their work ethic, how well they get along with other attorneys, and whether the attorney is likely to be a valuable addition to the firm. There is a great deal of competition for these summer positions. The type of summer position an attorney gets is often more important than their grades in shaping their ultimate career direction.

If you have not held a summer position, many law firms are likely to conclude that (i) you were not able to get a summer position, or (ii) you did not have an interest in one. These perceptions are the most significant obstacles you will need to overcome in your job search. If you are coming from a top law school, these questions may very well be even more pronounced because it is expected that law students from top law schools will work as summer associates. These issues, as well as your best strategy for getting a job, will be addressed below.

### **A. Overcoming the Potential Negative Associations of Not Working During the Summer**

Since employers may think that you were not able to get a position, or had no interest in getting such a position, it is important to overcome these perceptions.

#### **1. If you were not able to get a summer position**

If you were not able to get a summer position, you need to learn from this experience. And, when you go for interviews and market yourself you must counter the damaging impression that this failure may create.

If you tried to get a summer position but failed, you probably have spent a lot of time thinking about why this occurred. Your grades are high enough to suggest that you likely should have had



some interviews during law school. Did you interview poorly? Was there something wrong with your resume? Were you too selective in terms of the employers you approached? Whatever the problems are, they need to be diagnosed and fixed. At Legal Authority we assist attorneys everyday with resumes that need a great deal of work, or have common mistakes. Your resume and cover letter are key tools in your job search. If you suspect these need work, it is important that you find a professional who can help you. The story you tell in your cover letter will be essential to the success of your search. Crafting good cover letters to explain your background is an essential part of the service we provide our clients at Legal Authority.

A summer position is an important stepping-stone in many attorneys' careers. Your objective should be to overcome the negative associations of your failure to achieve this milestone by creating the impression that whatever you did benefited you more than a summer position would have.

This might be a simple task. If you had to spend time with a sick parent, or did significant volunteer work, you may have a great reason for not taking a law-related summer job. If you can articulate compelling personal reasons for not taking a summer position, employers are likely to respect your choice. You should be honest and forthright about your reasons, while making the strongest possible case.

However, if there were not compelling personal reasons for not working in the summer-and you simply did not get a position-you need to explain what you did during the summer in a positive way. We have heard stories of attorneys who spent the summer hiking, who spent the summer working in a family business-you name it. One of the easiest explanations is that you knew you would be spending the rest of your life practicing law and wanted to take the summer off (i.e., relax) before commencing your legal career. For many employers, an answer such as this will be more than sufficient. If you can address this confidently, many employers may overlook that you did not hold a summer position.

In addition, it is important to note that if your academic performance in law school is extraordinary (or marked by increasing and significant improvement), then employers may be less concerned that you did not work in law school.

Finally, it is worth noting that the practice of law - as well as life - is much like a race. If you could not get a position during law school, you are likely to be much hungrier and resourceful at this point in your legal career than you might otherwise have been. You are also likely to appreciate your first job more than if you had worked for the firm previously. Make the most of this!

## **2. If you did not have an interest in pursuing a legal-related position during law school**

Many attorneys simply do not have an interest in pursuing a legal-related position during law school, or they may have gone to law school with no plan to practice law after graduating. Some may have worked at another job during law school while attending law school at night, for example. However, if your law school does not have a night program, and if you were not interested in working as an attorney during law school, you may need to rethink a few things.



If you did not have an interest in being an attorney during law school, why now? People who practice law for the wrong reasons are often dissatisfied or perform poorly. Your fellow students in law school who simply dropped out were probably there for the wrong reasons. If you suddenly decide that you want to practice law after a few years of school, you are going to need to do some real introspection.

Perhaps you had some meaningful life experience while in law school that suddenly has convinced you that you want to practice law. It has certainly happened to many law students before you. If this is the case, it is not an explanation we recommend emphasizing in your job search.

One reason is that it makes your decision to attend law school appear poorly thought through. In addition, it raises the suspicion in an employer's mind that you do not have a single-minded obsession with practicing law. While this may not sound like something that is all that serious, it can be an obstacle for employers. Law firms want people practicing for them who are dedicated to their work and are convinced they want to be attorneys. The possibility that you might one day simply change your mind about your career path is frightening to law firms, especially since they are investing time and resources in your career.

Whatever the reason is for your career choice, you need to tell employers something that is true and portray it in a positive light. Above all, you must convince every prospective employer that you have the potential to be committed to your work and to succeed. Law firms can be sympathetic if you have other skills that set you apart. These skills should become the focus of your job search.

### **B. The Best Strategy for Getting a First Position**

If you approach your search correctly, you are almost certain to find employment. In addition, you should not be overly concerned about your law school grades. You are likely not finding employment because you are simply not being aggressive enough in your search.

The incoming classes at the most prestigious and highest paying law firms are going to be filled with people who were also summer associates at these firms. Accordingly, you are not likely to have much success by approaching these firms at this stage in your career. If these firms have been the focus of your search, you will need to expand your horizons.

As a fresh law school graduate, you are unlikely to have much luck conducting your search in the classified sections of legal newspapers or on job boards. However, you should always exhaust every option.

If you did well in certain classes in law school, there may also be professors who will recommend you to their acquaintances at firms. In addition, your career services office may be able to help you get started. You may have networking sources of your own you would like to use. Use all of these options.

In our opinion, your best strategy for getting your first position will be to aggressively market yourself to every firm you might like to work for. When you do market yourself, you should also do



it all at once and at that time contact as many employers doing the type(s) of work you would feel comfortable doing as possible. Then, you will be able to compare firms and their different cultures, salaries and make the best decision among the options you have.

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### **C. Conclusions**

Not having a summer position during law school is a difficult obstacle to overcome. Nevertheless, you are almost certain to find a good position if you market yourself correctly. Your best way for doing this is to market yourself to the types of employers you would like to work for. While you are likely to get a position, remember that your chances of landing with a top tier firm are reduced by the fact that you did not work with a top firm during the summer.

Employers will be concerned with the reasons you did not work during the summer. This is something only you can answer. Whatever the reasons are, it is something you need to address in an honest and effective way. How you handle this stage of your life will in some respects determine the path of your legal career.