



Student to lawyer: 20 tips for a smooth transition

This is an abridged version of the *LAWPRO* article: “20 tips for a successful transition” – a guide for law students through the transition from student life to legal practice. See practicepro.ca/20tips for the full article.

- 1 Honestly assess your strengths and preferences to identify what makes sense for you in terms of the type of firm and area of law you want to practice.
- 2 Consider all the options: big firm, small firm, solo practice, government, in-house. Don't just pursue the opportunities everyone else is pursuing – reflect on what is the best fit for you.
- 3 Create and prioritize a list of your options (from your most desired choices, to alternatives you'd accept).
- 4 Identify what makes you unique and use that to sell yourself. See “Job market scoop: What do law firms look for?” at page 2.
- 5 Consider if you have what it takes to be a sole practitioner. Take our self-assessment quiz on page 10 to help you decide.
- 6 Be prepared to work within the realities of articling, the Law Practice Program (LPP) and the job market. Strive to be both positive and realistic.
- 7 Be prepared to deal with uncertainty. You can't control all the factors that influence your career path; but you can commit to making the best decisions possible under the circumstances.
- 8 Be ready to adapt to changing circumstances and external factors. Your vision of the kind of practice that's right for you will likely evolve as you gain experience. Be flexible and open to opportunities.
- 9 Prepare your resume and the supporting information you will use to sell yourself in interviews. Consider including writing samples and references – with appropriate permission.
- 10 Contact potential employers in the order in which you have prioritized your options. Research employers online – or even better: network with friends and family to learn about opportunities.
- 11 Don't have an existing network of contacts? Begin building one! A good first step is to polish your social media presence. Visit practicepro.ca for our article “The essential LinkedIn Dos and Don'ts for law students.”
- 12 Make a good impression at a job interview by preparing answers to the probing open-ended questions you're most likely to be asked. (See our list of sample questions at practicepro.ca/20tips).
- 13 Once you have a job, get delegated tasks done right by understanding parameters and deadlines and asking for feedback.
- 14 Good client communication is essential. See the Fall 2011 edition of *LAWPRO Magazine* for useful articles about communication.
- 15 Find a mentor who can help you improve your skills. There are mentoring programs available from the Law Society (lsuc.on.ca), the Ontario Bar Association (oba.org) and the Advocates' Society (advocates.ca).
- 16 Make time for ongoing marketing and client development efforts. For marketing tips go to practicepro.ca/20tips, to see the original “Student to lawyer: 20 tips for a successful transition.”
- 17 Be nice! The legal world is very small – you will meet the same people over and over again – and your reputation will get around.
- 18 Have a life outside of law to help deal with the stresses of the job. While at school, you can find help for serious stress from on-campus providers; and once you become a member of the Law Society, you can contact Homewood Health to access confidential member assistance services.
- 19 Take care of yourself physically and mentally to avoid burnout. See articling student Alexandra Kozlov's article “Stress management for law students (from a recent grad!)” on page 23 for some tips about how to cope with typical student stressors.
- 20 Trust your instincts, think long-term and be prepared for unexpected turns in your career. ■