

Nebraska

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Young Lawyers Section

As always, submissions to the Young Lawyers Section Page from young attorneys across the state are welcome. If you're interested in writing, please contact Jamie Hermanson, Editor, at jcmhermanson@gmail.com.

Finding Your Niche

by Joshua Woolf

Trial team, case studies, flowcharts, the Erie Doctrine—law school was full of activities designed to give us the skills needed to work as an attorney. To some extent, these activities translate into workplace activities. For those who work as a solo practitioner, a course on how to collect from a client who cannot or will not pay may have been beneficial. For some attorneys, a course on sorting through medical records for hours on end may have given a more realistic idea of what practice would look like. For others, statutory interpretation and how it affects corporate governance and asset transfers was just the thing. For many of us, perhaps the requirement that we measure our time spent studying, briefing, practicing, or in class in three or six minute intervals and report on a monthly basis to our professors for analysis, cuts, and grading would have helped prepare us better. The fact of the matter is, it can be hard to know where you want to land after law school if you haven't experienced the world of legal practice.

For many young attorneys, the first three to five years of practice are just as eye opening of an experience, and just as steep a learning curve, as the first three weeks of the Socratic method. Let's face it, the job market for attorneys isn't what it used to be. For 2015 graduates of Creighton University, 77 out of 121 found full time, long term employment that required bar passage (as of April 7, 2016). For the University of Nebraska College of Law, 87 out of 125 found the same (as of August 2016). For many law school graduates, the ability to land inside our desired practice area is not a reality at the time of graduation. After graduation, and the joyous few months following graduation while we study for the bar, we hope and pray to receive the news that we've passed the bar. Then the job search begins. Eventually, this targeted and focused job search based on what we know we want to do may begin to become a desire to simply find a job where we can use the skills we've worked so hard to achieve. This means that in the first several years of practice there can be quite a bit of lateral transition as young attorneys jockey for positions they deem to be more desirable or within their desired practice.

Many law school graduates may not know what area of law they wish to practice at the time of graduation. Without the hands-on experience of practice, it is quite difficult to know whether you will really enjoy the type of work you take on. Add to that the fact that you may take a position simply because you

need a job to pay your bills (I'm looking at you, student loans) and it's a small wonder that there is a high amount of turnover among young attorneys. The point of all this, which may seem like griping to some, is just this: it's okay not to know what type of law you want to practice right after graduation. It's okay to change your practice after being out there for a year, two years, four years. Sometimes it takes a little while to find that niche and that's just fine. Take the time to find it, explore a little—chances are you're going to be doing this for a while.

Joshua Woolf graduated from Creighton Law School in 2014 and currently works for Engles, Ketcham, Olson, and Keith, P.C. in Omaha. A Washington native, Joshua earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from Brigham Young University prior to moving to Omaha to attend law school. When not at the office, you can usually spot him wandering downtown Omaha with his Husky, Rogue.



How to Establish Yourself as an Expert: 5 Tips for Young Lawyers

by Angela Lennon

As we all know, the definition of what it means to be a lawyer has shifted in recent years. Being a good lawyer isn't enough anymore. You also have to be a savvy businessperson and provide value to your firm or company. In traditional firms, this means rainmaking at all levels.

Because law school doesn't really teach us how to practice law, run a business, or market ourselves, most new lawyers spend the first several years in practice learning the ropes and soaking up information and experiences. As a result, establishing expertise is often the last thing on a new lawyer's mind.

However, I advocate for flipping that model upside down and establishing an "expertise mindset" from the beginning.

In an industry where you are referred business by those who know, like, and trust you, what can young lawyers do in the first several years of practice to position themselves as experts? You can establish relationships to be known and liked by your peers—but to be trusted and referred business, you have to intentionally position yourself as an expert to others.

1. Be Intentional

Sure, if you put your head down and grind it out, you'll eventually establish yourself as an expert in your practice area. This is



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how the great lawyers of our time built their reputations. But that was then.

The good news is that it doesn't have to take a decade or more to establish yourself as an expert in your field. If you are intentional and deliberate in your focus and pursuit of expertise, you'll get there much faster.

The first step is to simply be aware that you have the ability to establish yourself as an expert in other people's eyes. Don't just wait for the day when someone else deems you worthy of the expert title. It's a choice you can make. It's not just something that happens to you.

2. Get Involved

As a young associate, you are definitely grinding it out. So, adding "participating in a professional organization" to your plate may seem overwhelming. However, your return on investment will be well worth it.

For example, if you want to focus your practice area on construction law, join state and local bar organizations. Get involved with the local committee dedicated to construction law. If a committee doesn't exist, help to create one. Get involved with trade groups relevant to your practice area.

Be a leader in those groups. Gain the confidence and respect of those in your practice area. Eventually, you'll be the go-to person.

3. Reach Out

Who is already an expert in your desired field? Find those people and start connecting with them. Take them to coffee or lunch. Put yourself out there and get on their radar. Focus on bringing them into your circle of influence. You know the saying that you are the average of the 5 people you spend the most time with? To accelerate your expertise, develop relationships with the experts.

4. Create Opportunities

The absolute worst thing you could do is sit back and wait for opportunities to come to you that will "show off" your expertise. Don't wait for someone to ask you to write an article in the local bar association magazine. Don't wait for a committee to ask you to give a CLE presentation on a topic in your field.

Local bar associations are always looking for those willing to write an article for their magazines or give a presentation. Find ways to add value to your community, your colleagues, and your clients, and use that value to capitalize on opportunities to demonstrate your expertise.¹

5. Spread the Word: Work Smarter, Not Harder

One of my greatest teachers has taught me to always "use what you already have to get more of what you want." In this case,

capitalize on what you've already done to further position yourself as an expert.

For example, let's say you write an article that is published in your local bar association newsletter. The point is not just that you wrote the article. The bigger point is that you leverage the fact you wrote an article by sharing it on social media (think Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn). Share it with your co-workers. Begin to create your brand. If someone reaches out to congratulate you about the article, ask to take them to coffee or lunch so you can build a relationship with them.

You and you alone are responsible for the trajectory of your career. And the best news is that you don't already need to be an expert to position yourself as an expert in your industry or field. By taking these actions, not only will you become an expert, you'll accelerate your expertise even faster.

Angela Lennon is an attorney at Koenig|Dunne Divorce Law. She is the current President of the Nebraska Women's Bar Association and the Chair of the Young Lawyer's Division of the Omaha Bar Association. Angela is also a member of the Nebraska Academy of Collaborative Professionals, and is a licensed collaborative divorce lawyer. You can find more information about Angela's practice and contact her at www.nebraskadivorce.com.



¹ Editor's note: The NSBA always welcomes proposals for CLEs and/or *The Nebraska Lawyer* articles. Contact Sara Weber at sweber@nebar.com.

Comfortable Being Uncomfortable by Jamie Hermanson

As a new attorney, I spend a lot of time being uncomfortable. There have been many times when a Judge asks me a question and I fumble through a response, only later to think of 30 answers that would have been better. I spend hours reading through case law and statutes and answer the question I originally had but end up with 5 more. I have been asked many questions by clients and I don't have the answer, I have been so nervous for hearings that I have felt physically ill; this list could continue. This feeling is not enjoyable to me as I prefer to be prepared and knowledgeable on the topics I practice. I started thinking about this and wondered if I am ever going to feel comfortable and confident in what I know and what I can do.

After a while, this was really starting to bother me, so I asked other attorneys if they ever felt this way and if they did, how did they handle it? I received answers such as "Fake it until you make it," "Do the research and be prepared," etc. This was all good advice, but not really something that would help me move forward. I spoke with another attorney who has been practicing for many years and her brave response was, "I still don't know