

Sources to Help New Attorneys “Bridge the Gap” Instead of Step in It

By Clare D. Membiela

Last week, I had jury duty. I have been a law librarian for almost 22 years in law firms and law schools, but I still find intrigue in the workings of a court. While I sat taking in the atmosphere, a thought struck me like a slap—it must be terrifying for a new attorney entering this environment. Even if an attorney has some experience, the first day of being on your own is daunting. New lawyers need sources and support, so I have assembled a brief and noncomprehensive guide to sources that can help law students bridge the gap.

The New Attorney's Top Tips for Success

(1) Seek out a mentor. Much evidence exists indicating that a good mentor can make the transition to practice more successful and less stressful. Many associations have mentoring programs. Below are several good mentoring resources:

- Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough Center on Professionalism at the University of South Carolina School of Law, Initiatives & Awards—Mentoring Programs <<http://professionalism.law.sc.edu/barinitiatives.php?id=10>>. All websites cited in this article were accessed September 23, 2009.
- Christensen, *Equalizing the mentoring learning curve: What's a new solo attorney to do without a mentor?* ABA Center for Professional Responsibility (December 2007) <<http://www.abanet.org/cpr/about/mentoring.pdf>>.
- American Bar Association, Young Lawyers Division Mentorship Project <<http://www.abanet.org/mentoring/>>. These web pages include clips from the nonprofit StoryCorps® project that vividly illustrate the importance of mentoring.

- Law school career placement office. Placement professionals are on top of information relating to the success of new lawyers. Contact information can be found on the web or through an alma mater's alumni office.
 - Dershowitz, *Letters to a Young Lawyer (Art of Mentoring)* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).
 - Yurko, *Mentoring, A guide for both sides* (Yurko Salvesen & Remz, 2005) <www.bizlit.com/docs/about/articles/mentor.html>.
 - Abbott, *The Lawyer's guide to mentoring* (Washington DC: NALP, 2000). This is an older resource, but widely cited; see description at <<http://www.nalp.org/thelawyersguidetomentoring>>.
 - practicePRO, et al., *Managing a Mentoring Relationship* <<http://www.practicepro.ca/practice/Mentoring.asp>>. This website includes articles and guides sponsored by practicePro, a Canadian risk management and law practice management company.
- (2) Network.**
- Join a local bar association's young lawyers' group. Go to meetings! The State Bar of Michigan has a Young Lawyers Section; see <<http://www.michbar.org/younglawyers/>>. A list of local and specialty bar associations is available at <<http://www.michbar.org/resources/localspecialbar.cfm>>.
 - Check out the ABA Young Lawyers Division New Lawyer Roadmap. This table shows ABA practice sections that have elements of interest to new attorneys, such as sections with sub-groups for new attorneys; see <<http://www.abanet.org/yld/benefits/roadmapglance.shtml>>.
 - Try social networking sites. These sites can be useful—but do your homework. Check with employers for policies or restrictions. Review relevant local bar and practice rules. Consult a colleague on the dos and don'ts. Resources include:
 - Howell & Svenson, *Ins and Outs of Social Networking for Lawyers: How Tough Is It to Cast Your Profile into Infinity?* 34 Law Prac 47 (January 2008), available at <www.abanet.org/lpm/magazine/articles/v34/is1/pg47.shtml>.
 - Black, *Five Things Lawyers Should Know About Social Media*, The Daily Record (June 29, 2009), available at <<http://nylawblog.typepad.com/files/dr-6.29.09.pdf>>.
 - Contact the law school alumni office. Find alumni in the area and contact them. There may be meetings or recruitment events for alumni who live or practice in particular areas.
 - Talk to colleagues. Ask which sites and groups they would recommend.

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(3) Review and update research skills.

New associates should be able to obtain legal and nonlegal information in a variety of formats. It is essential to know the best and most cost-effective option for the project at hand; options include:

- Your local law library. Many law libraries have e-mail and telephone reference services as well as in-person reference desks. Check library websites to review hours and policies.
- Meyer, *Law Firm Legal Research Requirements for New Attorneys*, 101 *Law Libr J* 3 (2009).
- Gabriel and Matilda Barnett Information Technology Center and the Asa V. Call Law Library, University of Southern California Law School, *A Research Guide for Law Students and New Attorneys* (2009), available at <<http://law.usc.edu/library/assets/docs/ResearchGuide2009.pdf>>. Geared toward California attorneys but, overall, a good resource.
- Cleveland State University Law Library, Alumni Resource Guide—Legal Research for Practitioners <<http://www.law.csuohio.edu/lawlibrary/services/AlumniGuide/Research.html>>.
- Lexis Hub for New Attorneys <<http://law.lexisnexis.com/webcenters/newattorney/research-and-writing/rightsource>>.
- Michigan law school research guides and links:
 - o University of Michigan Law School Law Library Research Guides <<http://www.law.umich.edu/library/students/research/Pages/researchguides.aspx>>.
 - o Wayne State University Arthur Neef Law Library Subject Guides <<http://www.lib.wayne.edu/law/resources/guides/guide.php?id=208>>.
 - o Michigan State University College of Law, MSU Law Library: Index of Free Web Resources <<http://www.law.msu.edu/library/substantive/>>.
 - o Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Cooley Law School Libraries' Cooley Research Guides (a personal favorite!) <http://www.cooley.edu/library/research_guides/index.htm>.

- o University of Detroit Mercy Kresge Law Library Research Resources <<http://www.law.udmercy.edu/lawlibrary/research.html>>.
- Know employers' policies on fee-based research services (don't assume you know this):
 - o What does the firm pay for the service(s)?
 - o How does the firm bill use to clients?
 - o What (if any) are the usage restrictions?
 - o What materials are accessible? All databases? Only a portion of the service?
 - o Read the screens; services will notify users if they are searching outside their subscriptions (and incurring additional charges).
 - o What else is available? ICLE Online? PACER? Bloomberg Law? Print alternatives? Even if you've always used a particular source in the past, there may be new sources for good information.
- Get training. Online services offer in-person, telephone, or webinar training to subscribers. A little training can save big bucks in search costs. Call the services' customer support numbers for information.
- Know how to effectively use Google. Click the "Advanced Search" link to display the Advanced Search page. From there, click the "Advanced Search Tips" link to display tips for terms and connectors searching, search restrictions, and how to retrieve information more effectively.
- Know how to evaluate the quality of information found on the Internet. Review *Evaluating the Quality of Information* at <www.virtualchase.com/quality/index.html>. The Virtual Chase is a good legal research web page.
- Use customer support resources. Support personnel are often attorneys and can help users find information quickly. The service is usually free. Westlaw and Lexis resources are particularly good.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Consult a colleague to see if the firm has a work product database. A similar document

may already have been drafted that could save you time.

(4) Respect others. Occasionally, new attorneys forget that "supporting players" are an invaluable part of a legal team. Administrative assistants, paralegals, and yes, law librarians, have experience and knowledge that new attorneys don't. Respecting this knowledge and experience is essential for someone who has never filed a document with a court, never had to run documents, and never had to arrange a deposition. Resources for working with support staff include:

- Robbi, *Retaining authenticity can increase effectiveness*, 25 Tex Law 26 (May 18, 2009).
- Peckman, *First-year associates' lessons for working with support staff. All you really need to know you learned in kindergarten*, 7 NY L J S18 (September 2008).

(5) Follow the rules. There are times when an attorney's ethics are tested; a good mentor can be a godsend at such times. Ethics resources include:

- Levy, "One unethical decision leads to another," *Mich. Supreme Court Chief Justice warns future lawyers*, Mich Law Wkly, February 9, 2009, available at <<http://www.allbusiness.com/legal/legal-services-lawyers/11865945-1.html>>.
- McKim, *Maximize your lawyer potential: Professionalism and business etiquette for law students and lawyers* (St. Paul, MN: Thomson West, 2009).
- Lawrence & Fox, *Red flag: A lawyer's handbook on legal ethics* (Philadelphia, PA: American Law Institute—American Bar Association, Committee on Continuing Professional Education, c2005(2009 supp)).
- Thompson, *Quick and easy ethics tips for new lawyers* <<http://www.abanet.org/media/youraba/200811/article11.html>>.

(6) Be aware. Keep current. Discussion lists, blogs, RSS feeds, journals, and newsletters (available in print, online, and via e-mail) can provide new attorneys with opportunities to shine. Here are few ways to keep current:

- Use an RSS reader. The University of Wisconsin Library has a good guide

to RSS feeds and readers at <<http://www.library.wisc.edu/alerts/>>.

- Blogs are a great current awareness tool. Blawg, <www.blawg.com>, can help users locate law-related blogs. Google has a blog search at <<http://blogsearch.google.com>>. BeSpacific, <www.bespacific.com>, is a good example of a blog that provides quality, up-to-date information of interest to legal researchers. ■

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RESOURCES

Arron, *What can you do with a law degree?: A lawyer's guide to career alternatives inside, outside & around the law* (Seattle: Decision Books, 2004).

Braun, *Commentary: Tough love for new associates*, Tex Law, August 4, 2009 <<http://www.law.com/jsp/law/careercenter/lawArticleCareerCenter.jsp?id=1202432739826>>.

Drake University Law Library, *Resources for the new lawyer: A research guide* <www.law.drake.edu/library/?pageID=rrcNewLawyers>.

Foonberg, *How to start and build a law practice* (Chicago: ABA, Law Student Division, Law Practice Management Section, 2004).

Hamline University Law School, *Five Indispensable Tips for Law Students and New Lawyers* <<http://law.hamline.edu/node/2927>>.

Herrmann, *The Curmudgeon's Guide to Practicing Law* (Chicago: ABA, 2006).

Lund, *Jagged Rocks of Wisdom: Professional Advice for the New Attorney* (HI: Fine Print Press, 2007).

Melcher, *The Creative Lawyer: A Practical Guide to Authentic Professional Satisfaction* (Chicago: ABA, 2007).

Messinger, *The Young Lawyer's Jungle Book: A survival guide* (HI: Fine Print Press; 2d ed, 2000).

University of California, Berkeley Law School, *Berkeley Law Blog entry on tips for new attorneys*, abstract available at <<http://careers.berkeleylawblogs.org/2009/06/25/some-success-tips-for-new-lawYERS/>> (full article available upon registered sign in).