

## Legal Career: 10 Ways to Avoid Common First-Year Associate Mistakes

---

Tuesday, November 27, 2018

You are beginning the [first year of your new legal career](#). No one likes to visualize the specter of coming mistakes, but you are going to make them. With a bit of preparation, however, you can avoid first-year associate mistakes and the mishaps at your new law firm. Let's take a look at some of the most important things that you can do to avoid mistakes.

### 1. Explore your new law firm to the fullest degree before your first day.

Pay attention to the firm's entire website, [learning as much as you can](#) about the other attorneys, staff, history and philosophy. Look at the firm's social media. Finally, become familiar with any mentions in news. Knowing as much as you can about your new law firm will bolster your confidence and help you become familiar with the inner workings. It will also help you to avoid first-year associate mistakes.

### 2. Be courteous and kind to everyone you meet. \*Biggest First-Year Associate Mistake

[It matters how you treat people](#). It's a given that you will treat partners and senior attorneys at your law firm with respect, but it's important to treat the staff equally well. These are the people who will help you to achieve success in your new career. They can also assist you in avoiding first-year associate mistakes. Building a positive reputation for yourself as a new lawyer is one of the most important things that you can do. Aside from your own takeaways from being respectful and kind to people, it's simply the right thing to do.

### 3. Look the part of a lawyer.

Showing your individuality is a fun thing but leave the piercings and wild hairdos for after work. Dress appropriately and professionally while on the job.

### 4. Learn everything that you can by [observing the attorneys you admire the most](#).

Study their work and social habits. Ask them questions. What are their work systems, how do they approach matters, how do they prepare for discovery and depositions? Learn from them and mimic them.

### 5. Own your mistakes.

As we pointed out, you are going to make first-year associate mistakes. How you handle those mistakes will speak volumes to your senior attorneys and others at your law firm. Own the mistake and immediately come up with a solution to the mistake. If you need help with a solution, ask for help from a more senior attorney.

### 6. Find a mentor.



Article By [PracticePanther](#)  
[Jaliz Maldonado](#)

[Law Office Management](#)  
[All Federal](#)

Look for senior attorneys with whom you [share personality traits](#). A mentor will teach you how to be a successful attorney in your new law firm and will help you to avoid making first-year associate mistakes. Trusting someone to ask your seemingly silly questions will go a long way to building your confidence, as well.

## **7. Accept that you don't know what you don't know.**

Ivy Grey pointed out in [Advice to My Young Associate Self](#) that there are simply things that you will simply not know. She calls these "blind spots" and mentions that with time, you will begin to recognize and uncover your blind spots. To get to that point, she suggests taking advantage of mentoring, "actively reading bar publications, listening to [podcasts](#) and participating in your local bar association."

## **8. Understand the matter.**

Your assignments will more than likely be components of a much larger matter. Make sure you [know and understand the bigger picture](#). How will your part seamlessly mesh with this larger matter? Are there issues that you foresee? If so, point them out and a solution to go along with the problem. If you show this initiative, you might be given a larger role in the matter.

## **9. Take advantage of training.**

Your law firm might offer training sessions periodically. [Make time to attend these sessions](#). At this point in your career, soak up all the learning opportunities that you can.

## **10. Turn in final work, not draft work.**

Don't rely on your supervising attorney to do your proofreading for you. [Turn in work that is free of errors](#) such as typos or grammatical mistakes. (This includes email contents.) In addition to giving a blunt "yes" or "no" to the question at hand, give creative solutions to problems or roadblocks.

## **Conclusion**

Again, you are going to make first-year associate mistakes. However, behaving with grace under pressure will get you past these mistakes. By being mentally prepared beforehand, you can let yourself actually learn from your mistakes so that you can move on as a better lawyer.

© Copyright 2019 PracticePanther

**Source URL:** <https://www.natlawreview.com/article/legal-career-10-ways-to-avoid-common-first-year-associate-mistakes>