

THE NATIONAL LAW REVIEW

Legal Career: Common Mistakes of a First-Year Law Firm Associate

Monday, February 18, 2019

Transitioning from law school into the “real world” can be traumatizing for even the readiest of law students. There are simply some aspects of one’s occupation that cannot be predicted or known until they are actually experienced, first-hand, on-the-job, in the trenches, as it were. As a result, common mistakes of a first-year law firm associate are all too common in their field. Law school, while preparing legal professionals for the heady theoretical aspects of their future roles, do not have the ability to teach every practical facet of being an attorney. With this in mind, a first-year law firm associate would do well to consider many of the common mistakes those before have made, as well as how to prevent repeating them.

5 Most Common Mistakes of a First-Year Law Firm Associate

1. **Wrong Practice Area** — While new lawyers may have some say in the matter of where they work, the same is often not true of the particular area of law in which that they practice. Law firms can have practice groups in many different areas of the law. There are tax groups, estate law groups, trial litigation in various areas, etc. The list goes on.

If there is some small chance of having a say in which area a green attorney can practice, it would behoove them to make their preferences known. Otherwise, they may get stuck doing something that generally does not conform well with their strengths and weaknesses as an attorney, which may pose an obstacle to becoming a partner later on down the road.

2. **Immaturity** — Law firms might not seem especially similar to high schools, but the resemblances can be incredibly surprising. Complaints will abound, as will gossip circles. The truly astonishing thing is how many first-year law firm associates will join in and contribute to these rabble-raising sessions. The quickest way to get higher-ups to think that someone is not carrying their weight or untrustworthy is to grumble, spread unverified claims, and just generally be unpleasant about one’s job.
3. **Going It Alone** — All companies and organizations rely on their members to work together to achieve the common goal. First-year law firm associates often make the mistake of thinking that asking for help is a sign of weakness. They might even judge that offering their own assistance too regularly could reflect poorly on them, which couldn’t be further from the truth. Working at a law firm is being part of a team. First-years ought to keep this at the front of their mind.
4. **Workaholics** — Working hard is a fundamental part of being successful in any enterprise. However, as the old adage goes, there is a key difference between working hard and working smart. Many people are driven and ambitious, and this is also why many people choose to become lawyers. That said, first-year law firm associates tend to overdo it, working too much, not pacing themselves, forgetting that a [career in law is a marathon, not a sprint](#). Striking the right balance can be difficult to attain, but it is well worth trying



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

[Labor & Employment](#)
[Law Office Management](#)
[All Federal](#)

because the only alternatives are sluggards and workaholics, neither one of which is particularly appealing to anyone.

5. **Lacking a Strong Supervisor** — This particular mistake relates to all those aforementioned for one very important reason: they can all be avoided with a good mentor. Having a guide, someone that a first-year associate can trust and confide in engenders both a feeling of comfort and respect, as well as a litmus test for when things are either going well or could be improved upon. Mentors usually have the unique position of being one's superior and having their best intentions at heart. They can assist a new attorney in figuring out their practice area, help them mature, keep them from working in isolation, and aid in striking the best work/life balance.

Last Note

If a first-year law firm associate keeps these very common mistakes [in mind when approaching their fresh start](#), they should do quite well. Finding one's place and [working hard and intelligently both combine to form a well-rounded attorney making their place in a brand new world](#).

© Copyright 2019 PracticePanther

Source URL: <https://www.natlawreview.com/article/legal-career-common-mistakes-first-year-law-firm-associate>