

## Law School Students: What are the Motives of the Modern Lawyer?



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Children often say things like, “When I grow up, I want to be an astronaut.” How many four-year-olds say they want to be an attorney? My guess is not quite as many as would like to go to the moon. Whatever the case may be, there are lots and lots of lawyers in this world, and it stands to reason that nearly all of them decided to become one based on one or more motivations. But what are the motives of the modern lawyer? They aspired to become a practicing modern lawyer because of these motives, whether it be ambition or inspiration or anything else.

In this day and age, as the world is flatter than ever and technological fields diversify and grow, there are still thousands of people entering law school each and every year. In 2010, there were over 50,000 law students enrolled at universities in the U.S. alone. The point is that lots of people want to become lawyers. For partners and [hiring managers at law firms](#), it makes sense to try to understand these new students and fresh-faced modern lawyers’ motivations and expectations in order to attract the best and brightest. Importantly, they need to keep them as well, encouraging them to stay as aspirational five and ten years into their careers as

they were when they started law school.

While there are plenty of motives for becoming a modern lawyer, there is a handful that stands out from the rest. Some of these are practical, others financial, and still others inspirational. From the [most pragmatic workaholics to the idealists that want to change the world](#), senior partners could learn much from connecting with this new generation of attorneys.

## **The Big Three Motives of the Modern Lawyer**

To begin with, there are more than a few lawyers who get into the business of practicing law because it can be quite lucrative. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this. Everybody wants to make as much money as they can. The earning potential of practicing attorneys is among the highest in any professional field. The median salary is well over \$100,000, so it certainly makes sense that this would be a primary motive for many.

On the other side are those dreamers and romantics whose goals are purely to help people in need. From working with impecunious clients to taking cases *pro bono*, or trying to effect social change through legislation, there are many ways that lawyers can help the world to be a better place. Many young attorneys see the present as a time of sea change for the American people, that the social and political tides are shifting, and they want to be a part of it.

Somewhere in the middle of these two is a crop of lawyers that see the practice of law as something both distinguished and reputable, as well as a professional in which they can work alongside other industries and fields in which they have a particular interest. Entertainment law allows people to work with celebrities and stars; green law enables attorneys to work toward improving the environment; international law comes with its own particular perks, like traveling the globe to represent clients and work on deals all over the world.

## **Summary**

Whatever an individual modern lawyer's goals are, there is a strong likelihood they fall into one of these three key areas. That being said, there also exists the possibility that more than one applies to any particular attorney. After all, there is no law against making good money, helping people in need, and seeing the world all at the same time. In fact, come to think of it, it's hard to conceive of a more rounded motivation for becoming a modern lawyer in the first place.

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