



## *Article of the Week from Harrison Barnes*

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### ***Top 20 Reasons Why There Is No Better Profession Than Practicing Law***

**Summary:** *Although it is often portrayed in a negative light, the practice of law is a wonderful profession to be a part of. Learn why in this article.*

Most of the news I hear about practicing law is consistently negative—in fact, there is so much negative news about practicing law it is difficult to speak to an attorney or read a legal publication without hearing or seeing something negative about it.

**See the following for more information:**

- **[25 Reasons Most Attorneys Hate the Practice of Law and Go Crazy \(and What to Do About it\)](#)**
- **[Why Do So Many Attorneys Ask “What’s the Point?”](#)**

However, practicing law is not really all that bad. In fact, it can be about the clearest path to security, wealth and prestige there is. The complaints related to practicing law tend to follow the ups and downs of the economy and the demands that are placed on attorneys at the very high end of the profession.

- On the one hand, during a bad economy, only attorneys from the very best schools and who have the very best grades are generally employable. The lack of opportunity for attorneys without these credentials is no different than is experienced by people without such credentials in most other professions.
- On the other hand, attorneys wishing to enter “the Olympics” of practicing law and to work at the largest law firms with the highest salaries often resent the demands on their time. But the highest paying jobs in all professions are generally extremely demanding.

Regardless of how you stack it, practicing law has its ups and downs. Nevertheless, attorneys who dwell on the “negatives” often miss the huge “positives” that go along with being an attorney. All in all, the positives of practicing law far exceed those of most other professions.



Attorneys are trained—by nature—to find fault in everything and so attorneys find fault with their profession just as they find fault with the arguments of their opponents. Attorneys typically go into the practice of law because they are very ambitious. Until they go to law school and start practicing law, however, most of these attorneys have never been surrounded by people as ambitious as they are. Set against each other and competing for a slice of prestige, recognition, money, or jobs, attorneys can become cynical when they do not get everything they are accustomed to getting. They get even angrier and more cynical during recessions. Then when things are good they start feeling entitled, envious of other attorneys, demanding more money and the cycle repeats itself again and again.

- See **Why Every Big Firm Practice Area Eventually “Self-Destructs” at Least Once Every Eight Years** for more information.

No other profession offers the opportunity to do so many things. When attorneys complain to me about regretting going to law school, or about being attorneys in general, I like to remind them of the following positive things about practicing law. The reality is that no other profession offers so many potential benefits like law does:

### **1. Most Attorneys Earn Much More Money Than They Would Otherwise Earn**

Just about anyone can get into law school, graduate from law school and pass the bar exam. It is true that certain law schools and bar exams are more challenging than others, but for the most part it is fairly easy to go to law school and become an attorney if you set your mind to it.

To become an attorney, you do not need to take a lot of math and science classes in college, like you would if you wanted to become a doctor. You also do not need to become an expert in spreadsheets and know a lot of math, as do accountants, bankers and MBAs.

In fact, becoming an attorney is something that is not that difficult to do at all. It is a lot of work and takes three years, but just about anyone who wants to become an attorney can do so.

Most attorneys go to college and major in liberal arts-related disciplines that don't necessarily lead to abundant opportunities for gainful employment, such as political science, anthropology, fashion design, art, or music. Law schools do not care. Law school is open to everyone!



If you have no idea what you are interested in doing when you get out of college or graduate school, just about the smartest thing you can do is go to law school. You can take a degree and set of skills that is essentially worthless in the market and parse it into a job where your starting salary might even be well into the six figures—or more than you could make if you earned a PhD and then managed to get a tenured spot at a major American university after a decade or so.

According to a recent tabulation of Bureau of Labor of Statistics data, out of 820 occupations and their wages in 2013, attorneys came out in [the 21<sup>st</sup> spot](#), behind certain medical professionals and chief executives but ahead of hundreds of other professionals and workers, including airline pilots, financial managers, geoscientists, real estate appraisers, teachers, and electricians.

The website Glassdoor reports that the [national average lawyer salary is \\$141,560](#), with a Los Angeles average of \$172,667 and a New York average of \$167,506. Many [first-year associates at law firms](#) with more than 700 lawyers in major markets earn salaries of \$160,000.

- **See [2015 LawCrossing Salary Survey of Lawyer Salaries in Best Law Firms](#) for more information.**

Regardless of how you stack it, attorneys earn good livings and (in general) earn much more than they could ever earn with the sorts of undergraduate degrees most of them have. There is really no other way for someone with a degree of questionable market value to get out of school and make a good living so quickly. I've seen art majors, acting majors, forestry majors, fashion design majors, anthropology majors, sociology majors and others with degrees that will most likely not translate into much money in the market go to top ten law schools and come out with great jobs.

## **2. Attorneys Command the Respect of Society (Mostly)**

Lawyers are extremely respected and looked up to compared to other professions. The most highly esteemed people in most areas of the country are often attorneys. Attorneys are judges, politicians and others who have an important role in running the government wherever they go. [Forty-one percent of the people in the 113th Congress](#) are attorneys. [Forty-six of the 498 chief executive officers](#) listed on Forbes' 500 in 2012 had law degrees.

- In my own small community, I have been asked to lead community boards and to help sort out various neighborhood issues—just because I am an attorney.



- People ask me for advice all the time and are willing to pay me for it—just because I am an attorney.

For all the flak the profession sometimes gets about dishonesty, when it comes down to it people respect lawyers because attorneys have the power to protect them. It was lawyers who designed the very fabric of our government and society and it is lawyers we look to when we need help or redress. At their best, lawyers trade in truth, justice, liberty and fairness. The very fact that lawyers have the power to do this – and to influence so much in so many arenas – indicates the might and nobility of the profession and the reason why it is held in such esteem by those who are not vested with such power.

The respect that being an attorney gives you is something that no one can ever take away from you. You cannot put a price on that. There are few other professions that offer such a rapid and virtually guaranteed pass to the middle and upper-middle classes as being an attorney. You can come out of the lower classes, or out of the worst imaginable background, but once you become an attorney you suddenly have the respect of society.

It is true that some areas of the country have proportionately more attorneys than other places and thus attorneys may not command as much awe in those places (such as Washington, DC, New York and Los Angeles); however, for the most part people in society respect attorneys and view them with distinction even in areas where they are plentiful.

There are few professions other than law that confer on members such a high level of respect. I am happy that I am an attorney. I appreciate this honor every day and have never regretted it.

### **3. Attorneys Have a License to Start a Business That Is Always in Demand and Protected from Competition**

All attorneys have to do is announce to the world that they are attorneys and people will find them and pay them money. If you are an attorney you can set up an office out of your home, rent a small office, or set up a small business with a few other attorneys. You'll need a website, some marketing and may have to knock on some doors—but if you want to have your own business, a law license allows you to do this. It is fast, simple and cheap, and yet you are expected to be able to charge a lot of money for your services. You can take contingency cases, charge by the hour—



it's up to you. If you get a law degree, you suddenly have a world of opportunities open to you for starting your own business.

The great thing about being an attorney is that there is a barrier to entry. Not everyone can simply announce that he or she is an attorney and start practicing law. This is very different from many other professions and types of jobs where no license is necessary and where everyone who wants to can compete with you. When you practice law, you are protected from competition because the only way someone can compete against you is by having a law license in your state as well as (in some cases) competency in your area of law.

I receive calls from attorneys a few times a year who are retiring and need me to find someone to take over their practices. In many cases, these attorneys are in small towns around the country and may be the only attorney in town or one of only a few attorneys in town. There are so many areas like this around the country where a new attorney can set up a practice—i.e., “business”—with very little difficulty and function with very little competition.

If an attorney is ambitious, that attorney can always use his or her law license to start a successful business. Not only that, he or she may get government subsidies to get things off to a good start. According to a 2013 [New York Times article](#), only two percent of small law practices were located in rural areas – even though one-fifth of the country lives in such areas. In some places in the United States, you might need to travel a hundred miles or more just to find an attorney. Things were so dire in South Dakota that the state passed a law offering attorneys an annual subsidy to live and work in the state's rural areas. Other states are also apparently looking into such measures to address lawyer-in-remote-area-scarcity issues.

- **See [Should You Start Your Own Law Firm? Top 10 Reasons Not to Start Your Own Firm and Top 10 Reasons to Start Your Own Firm](#) for more information.**

#### **4. Attorneys Have the Opportunity to Work with Important Clients and Interesting People**

A few weeks after I got my law license, I found myself sitting in the world headquarters of [Northrop Grumman](#) sorting through a bunch of documents about a classified submarine that the company had built and sold to a South American government. I then proceeded to write motions for this client over the next several months.



There are few professions where you will get to do significant work for these sorts of clients as quickly as you will by practicing law. Whether your client is the government, a major corporation, or an important entrepreneur, when you practice law you have the opportunity to work for and advise important clients. As such, you can help shape national and world events and it can be exciting and gratifying to participate in global affairs in this way.

If you choose to represent individuals, you will no doubt find them and their issues to be equally interesting. You will gain profound insight into human behavior and possibly even come to better understand yourself through understanding your clients.

Regardless whether you represent companies or individuals, as a lawyer you will have the opportunity to interact with a wide assortment of interesting and influential people and institutions. Not many other professions confer this kind of access and exposure and it is one of the many “positives” of the legal profession.

## **5. Attorneys Have the Ability to Easily Transition Between and Among Various Venues**

When you are practicing law, you can work in a wide variety of practice settings. It is not uncommon for attorneys to start out [in the government](#), [go to work for a law firm](#), [go in-house](#), start their own practices and even [work as a law professor](#) as well. There is [such a wide variety of opportunities](#) and settings that an attorney can be part of it is astonishing.

**See the following for more information:**

- [Areas of Practice](#)
- [BCG Attorney Search's Quick Reference Guide to Legal Practice Areas](#)
- [The Choices of Practice in Law](#)

Take [Kathleen M. Sullivan](#), for example, one of the nation's preeminent appellate litigators. She began her law career as a constitutional law professor at [Harvard Law School](#). Then she became Dean of [Stanford Law School](#). Today, she is a partner in [Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan's](#) New York office, where she represents clients such as [Shell Oil](#), [Google](#), [Cisco](#), and [Coca-Cola](#). Her career has taken her from Boston to California to New York, from the halls of academia to those of a top-flight law firm, and to courtrooms and boardrooms all across the country.



## 6. Attorneys Have the Ability to Make Profound Changes in Society

Attorneys can represent the underprivileged, free the wrongly convicted, change laws, empower groups of people, or even influence the functioning of entire governments. There is no other profession where an individual can make such profound changes in society.

Attorneys very quickly learn that the law is a powerful tool that they can use (if they choose) to help people, to shape society in their vision and to bring positive change to the world.

To get a sense of the breadth of ways in which people can use their law degrees in the public interest realm, take a glance at the [ABA's Public Interest Law Links page](#). The page has links to over 50 projects and initiatives that target areas of civil and human rights law. A lawyer can get involved and use his or her law degree to work on alternative parenting initiatives, to help the people of Darfur or Haiti, to assist Native Americans or at-risk youth, to lend a hand to those without adequate housing, to combat human trafficking, to secure racial justice, or to work on death penalty or poverty issues, among many other issues and causes.

## 7. Attorneys Get to Work with Smart People

Most attorneys are pretty intelligent. When you practice law you get to work with and be around other smart and interesting people. Working with smart people keeps you challenged and your mind active and sharp. Most smart people prefer to be around other smart people. When you practice law you have the ability to work with and be around other smart people throughout your career.

- **See [The People You Work and Associate with Can Either Make or Break You](#) for more information.**

When you talk to attorneys and ask them about their law school experiences, many (especially if they went to the better law schools) will remark that until they went to law school they had not been surrounded by so many intelligent people at one time. After three years of going to class with people who are as smart or smarter than you, and who constantly challenge you and keep you on your toes, you become accustomed to that level of intellectual rigor and become frustrated when it dissipates.





When you practice law you need not worry that you will lack intellectual stimulation. You will always be around these types of smart people—whether it is other attorneys, judges, or even some clients.

## **8. Attorneys Are Cerebral and Analytical and Can Solve Problems**

The average lawyer spends a lot of time thinking through issues and coming up with solutions to various problems. They enjoy this and, in many respects, the work is quite academic. Most attorneys are fairly academic anyway, so being an attorney provides an outlet for them to think and be cerebral.

The reason so many attorneys go into politics or become CEOs is because the process of becoming a lawyer (“thinking like a lawyer”) is not as much about learning specific laws as it is about developing the facility to work logically through any issue or problem – whether it relates to law or not – and to come up with a proposed solution or set of solutions. This kind of thinking, and the sense of balance and judgment it involves, is useful in all aspects of life and business and it is why the best attorneys are considered “counselors” in every sense of the word.

**See the following for more information:**

- [\*\*Problems\*\*](#)
- [\*\*You Need to Be Seen as the Cure\*\*](#)

## **9. Attorneys Can Specialize and Do the Sort of Work They Are Interested in**

Most attorneys (with the exception of general practitioners) end up specializing and doing the sorts of work that they are interested in—whether it is corporate law, litigation, patent law, environmental law, or otherwise. The ability to specialize is a huge luxury that should not be taken for granted. What this means is that before long, you can spend the majority of your time just concentrating on the issues, cases, and transactions that you find interesting and fulfilling.

For example, some people want to go to law school and become lawyers because they get to go to court and do trials. But unless you are a prosecutor or public defender, you generally will not be spending much time in court – and certainly not in trials. But if you work hard and become





an expert in the art of trial work, then as you mature in your legal career you might find yourself being sought out by other litigators who feel insecure about their courtroom prowess and who want you to do the trials on their cases to maximize the chances of victory. Soon you will be doing trials all the time. You will get to finish out your career doing what you love – courtroom sparring – as opposed to other aspects of the practice you are not as passionate about.

**See the following for more information:**

- [\*\*Specialize, Be Seen and Associate with Greatness\*\*](#)
- [\*\*The Right Time to Specialize\*\*](#)

## **10. Attorneys Have the Ability to Work Most of Their Lives**

I used to be an asphalt contractor prior to going to law school. I remember my father saying to me at one point: “You need to think if you would want to be doing that sort of work when you are in your forties.”

He was right. Working outdoors in the sun, lifting heavy stuff, driving around and breathing in toxic fumes was not the sort of work I would have wanted to do forever. In contrast, when you practice law you never really need to quit.

I once hired an attorney to assist me with some work who was in his mid-90s. He was still functioning and running a law practice with a secretary, a paralegal and an associate. He even was still golfing! Attorneys can practice most of their lives. While some law firms certainly may ask attorneys to retire at a certain point, many do not. Some attorneys practice their entire lives. One of the greatest luxuries of being an attorney is that you never really need to quit the profession once you start.

- See [\*\*Never Abandon Work You Are Exceptional At\*\*](#) for more information.

## **11. Attorneys Have the Ability to Continually Improve at What They Are Doing and Get Better and Better**

The longer you practice law, the better and more talented you often get. You learn more about the law, learn new angles and continually refine your craft and what you are doing. The ability to



continually learn more and get better and better and to always be able to improve is an exciting component of the profession. In some professions your skills may decline after some time, but when you practice law, your skills can actually improve.

We saw above how select litigators can get better and better at trial work until they reach the rarified ranks of true “trial attorneys.” Similarly, because practicing law is a career that can span decades, attorneys in all practice areas have the opportunity to continually take their work to ever-higher levels of excellence. The chance to reach the top of the ranks in a particular area and then to still have room to push higher is very gratifying for attorneys who are by nature strivers and the highest of achievers.

**See the following for more information:**

- [Never Stop Improving](#)
- [Never Stop Growing](#)
- [Practice Makes Perfect](#)

## **12. Attorneys Have the Chance to Get Extraordinarily Rich**

Some attorneys become incredibly wealthy practicing law. They may take on a huge company in a class action, win some sort of major verdict, make millions working in a large law firm, or take a piece of a company that ends up going public. I have seen countless attorneys earn massive amounts of money practicing law and I am aware of some attorneys who have actually retired very wealthy people in their late 30s.

Attorney [Joe Jamail Jr.](#) is a billionaire who made his money in personal injury cases. This “king of torts” successfully represented [Pennzoil](#) against [Texaco](#) to the tune of 10.5 billion dollars and earned 345 million dollars in contingency legal fees. That is an extreme example, but it just goes to show that when you practice law you have the opportunity to earn a lot of money and become incredibly rich.

## **13. Attorneys Have the Chance to Become Famous**

There are numerous attorneys who have become famous. A few that come to mind are [Hillary Clinton](#), [Barack Obama](#), [David Boies](#), [Alan Dershowitz](#), [John Grisham](#), [Mitt Romney](#) and [Jerry Springer](#).



Attorneys often end up becoming quite famous and for some reason they seem to have a special ability to do so. Perhaps it is because a law degree gives people “lawyer skills” which they transfer into other lucrative and high profile areas, such as entertainment and journalism. [Judith Sheindlin](#) is a former family law attorney who now earns millions of dollars as the star of “Judge Judy.” [David E. Kelly](#) left his law practice to write and produce television shows like [Picket Fences](#), [Ally McBeal](#) and [The Practice](#). [Phillip Graham](#) (founded [The Washington Post](#)), [Bob Woodruff](#) and [Cynthia McFadden](#) are people with law degrees who parlayed their talents into journalism.

- [See Twelve Sexy Things You Can Do with a Law Degree That \(1\) May Make You Famous and \(2\) Do Not Require Practicing Law for more information.](#)

#### **14. Attorneys Have the Chance to Easily Transition into Politics**

While you certainly do not need to be an attorney to get into politics, it definitely helps. For example, 25 of the 44 presidents of the United States have been attorneys. This is more than any other profession. Attorneys seem uniquely suited to politics compared to other professions. When you become an attorney your odds of successfully transitioning into politics increase exponentially.

#### **15. Attorneys Have the Chance to Bring Flexibility to Their Careers**

Attorneys have the flexibility to work in a variety of settings and in the manner they choose. Many choose to work in part-time legal jobs, as [contract attorneys](#), or in more demanding settings. Attorneys have a great deal of flexibility compared to other kinds of professionals. Some attorneys even relocate to remote areas and are able to continue practicing law by telecommuting.

The Philadelphia Bar Association has a model [Alternative Work Arrangements policy](#) that invites attorneys in good standing with their firms to submit proposals for a variety of alternative work arrangements, including reduced work, job sharing, flextime and telecommuting. “Virtual” law firms such as [VLP Law Group](#) and [SRD Legal Group](#) also offer alternative options to accommodate attorneys who want flexibility in work arrangements and entities that want good legal work done at reduced rates.



**See the following for more information:**

- [Telecommuting for Legal Work](#)
- [Various Alternative Work Arrangements for Attorneys and Lawyers](#)

## **16. Attorneys Have the Ability to Go Very, Very Far If They Choose to Do So**

I often see attorneys start out in small law firms and then through hard work and other factors wind up in giant law firms doing extremely well—even without stellar educational qualifications.

The practice of law gives you the opportunity to go as far as you want and to rise as high as you can push yourself. I know people who have become federal judges, multimillionaires, famous authors, partners in major law firms and more—and have done this all through the power of their law degrees plus ambition and hard work. There are so many great things you can do with a law degree.

- [See Top 10 Ways Attorneys Can Move to a Better Law Firm and Get a Better Attorney Job](#) for more information.

## **17. Attorneys Have the Opportunity to Get Paid for Writing**

The legal profession offers many outlets for people who love to write. Litigators and many other types of attorneys do a tremendous amount of writing as part of their jobs, whether it is pretrial motions, appellate briefs, client updates or articles in legal publications. The power of the pen can literally change the outcome of a case by convincing a judge to make one ruling as opposed to another. It is only through the process of writing that our ideas for governance become meaningful in the form of written laws and published opinions.

There is no shortage of [writing opportunities in law](#) and good writers love the profession because it gives them a way to turn an interest and passion for writing into income. The practice of law gives lawyer-writers the opportunity to get paid for doing something they love, and it also helps them become better writers by constantly requiring them to tighten up language, impose structure, order and clarity on ideas, and express complicated concepts in simple ways. Moreover, when you think of all the interesting dramas that play out in courtrooms and law firms around the country, you can



see how a good writer can use his or her professional work as fodder for fiction. Who knows which lawyer-writer out there will become the next [John Grisham](#) or [David Kelley](#).

## **18. Attorneys Have the Opportunity to Get Paid for Arguing**

Just like some lawyers love to write, others love to argue. They don't care what the topic of argument is or who the opponent is. They just love the process of debating and arguing. For these people, law is a great profession because it gives them the chance to argue as part of their regular everyday jobs. Lawyers argue all the time – with opposing counsel, judges, the government and anyone else who stands in the way of their clients. If you like to argue, then you can find happiness and fulfillment on a daily basis in the practice of law.

## **19. Attorneys Have Many Transferrable Skills**

As we have already seen, lawyers are constantly taking their “lawyer skills” and putting them to good use in all sorts of other professions. Given their skill-set, attorneys are well qualified for all kinds of other jobs, including sales, marketing, politics, writing, entrepreneurship and more. Attorneys also tend to have strong work ethics, and an ability to pay attention to detail, which can be very useful in other lines of work. Lawyers become journalists, authors, artists, business people, agents, and all sorts of other kinds of professionals.

**See the following for more information:**

- [\*\*60 Nontraditional Jobs You Can Do with a Law Degree \(and Should Strongly Consider Doing\)\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Twelve Sexy Things You Can Do with a Law Degree That \(1\) May Make You Famous and \(2\) Do Not Require Practicing Law\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Practicing Law Not the Only Option for Attorneys\*\*](#)
- [\*\*LawCrossing's Guide to Alternative Careers\*\*](#)

## **20. Attorneys Have the Chance to Sell to Lots of Different People**

Lawyers love to sell! They need to sell clients on their services (i.e., to convince clients to use their services as opposed to those of a competitor) and they need to sell judges, opposing



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counsel and others on their clients' side of the story or their interpretation of the law. If you enjoy selling, there is really no profession where your salesmanship will be as highly valued as in the practice of law.

- **See [You Need to Sell, Sell, Sell](#) for more information.**

### **Conclusions**

There are so many good reasons for being an attorney. All attorneys should appreciate the many “positives” associated with the law, no matter how they end up using their law degrees and “lawyer skills.” While there are many purported “negatives” associated with being a lawyer, most of these apply in the case of any profession. All in all, being an attorney is a wonderful job filled with tremendous challenges, opportunities and rewards.

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