

Getting the backstory: tips for employer background research

Summary: When it seems like all hope is lost in the legal industry, as lawyers, we need to take time for ourselves to look for opportunities. Here are some strategies to stay motivated and achieve success.

You are just beginning your job search. You know you are interested in a certain practice area, but do not know how to go about finding prospective employers in your [preferred location](#). Or, like many lawyers in this country, you want to practice in a small firm of less than 10 attorneys, but your research has revealed that many of those firms do not have websites. You may not want to go into private practice at all, but rather would like to clerk for a judge, represent the indigent at legal aid, or work for a nonprofit organization. How do you effectively and efficiently identify those organizations and what the lawyers in them do? Many options are available for researching your potential employer and equipping yourself to secure and ace the interview.

Gather the Facts

Getting started can be daunting. Of course, you can and should start with a web search for an employer of interest. Even perusing the website, however, does not constitute the [research skills](#) an employer will expect or that you will need to make an informed decision about applying to an organization or accepting an offer.

Your career services and alumni offices at both your law school and undergraduate institution can be of great assistance at this stage of your job-search process. Those offices can help you identify alumni working in a specific city or organization.

If you do not know which employers in your area practice the type of law you are interested in, "start with a general search of the attorney directory on Lexis Advance," recommended Jennifer Rumschlag, an attorney and academic account executive. Searches can be limited to graduates of your law school, a [specific practice area](#), or a geographic market. The attorney directory includes information on private practitioners, business leaders, and government officials. If you are a visual learner, Lexis Advance's Litigation Profile Suite provides pie charts and graphs showing attorneys' and judges cases by practice area.

Once you have that information, take action. Send an email to those alumni and request some time on their calendars to discuss their experiences in that employer's offices. They can give you an inside perspective on whether or not it is a welcoming environment, if it is a place where graduates of your institution succeed, and what the work environment truly is like.

Invest Time

Informational interviews. If you want to know what lawyers in certain fields actually do on a day-to-day basis, invite an attorney to an informational interview. [Informational interviews](#) are particularly helpful when you are beginning the job-search process and do not know how you want to use your law degree. These interviews are also useful for those who have already narrowed their practice areas of interests and are seeking advice about how to break into a certain field.

Bar association functions. Make time to attend bar association functions. If you attend law school in a community where you do not intend to practice, search the state bar's website for bar associations in your hometown or intended city. Plan to attend a bar association event when you are on break. Your attendance will not only help you to begin building your professional reputation and establishing your genuine interest in being a member of that legal community, but also will help you to begin developing a sense of others' opinions about employers in the area.

Make the most of your networking activities by doing your homework in advance. Rumschlag recommends that students "take advantage of the [Lexis] attorney directories to find contacts for informational interviews and to determine if your law school has a connection to the attorneys you want to meet." "It is a lot easier to

secure informational interviews" if you can establish that connection, she said.

Be Informed: Media Matters

Traditional media. Read the newspaper, bar association newsletters, and industry publications, not just for your job search, but to prepare to be a great lawyer. Whether you access the major newspapers on your tablet or read the hard copy in your school's library each morning, traditional media can provide a wealth of information about employers for which you are interested in working. Local business outlets like Crain's Business in New York, Chicago, and Detroit regularly produce lists of the [largest law firms](#) in a metropolitan area, or honor lawyers who have closed on the largest deals, or won the largest verdicts. Of course, these publications also report on items of interest to and about clients.

If tracking an employer's media mentions seems overwhelming, do not overlook the free resources you have access to as a student. Attorney Dana Marquez, academic account manager for Westlaw, reminds students about their full access to global news, including archives through WestlawNext's newspapers, profiler, and legal directory databases. "Students have more access now than what they often receive in practice," she said. "Why not use a free service specifically geared toward the law where you can get full-text access, not just abstracts?"

Marquez shared the story of a 2014 graduate, a Florida native who attended University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. The student used Westlaw's profiler and legal directory to determine who to reach out to in Philadelphia, where she wanted to move. She used the information as an icebreaker and heard back from a judge for whom she now works.

Social Media

Many employers maintain a robust social media presence. If you are interested in working for a particular organization, follow them on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. By doing so, you will learn what issues the employer deems important. Be sure that your social media profiles are professional, that your privacy settings are strict, and that the information on your pages reflects the type of lawyer you want to be.

Get Personal: Work Your Network

Do not neglect personal relationships. Faculty members often have colleagues throughout the legal community, not just in the city or region where your law school is located. Reach out to those in your student organizations or classes who may know of students who previously worked at the organizations where you are applying. And, do not underestimate the expertise of the law school administration and staff. At the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law, the career services office manager has been employers' primary point of contact for more than 20 years. Employers often share with her their recruitment philosophy, including what they look for in a [successful candidate](#). You are doing yourself a huge disservice if you do not take advantage of such insight or, worse yet, presume that a staff member may not know valuable information. Mentioning that a classmate, professor, law school administrator, or friend who knows the employer well encouraged you to apply may be the distinguishing factor that compels the recruiter to pull your application materials out of the stack in an increasingly competitive job market.

Following these tips will help you achieve your ultimate goal of demonstrating that you are a detail-oriented person who goes above and beyond. You are meticulously prepared, and will likely handle employers' matters and clients with the same care.

See more articles here: <https://www.bcgsearch.com/article/legalarticles.php>