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Career Consult

What I Did On My Summer Vacation

By **Stephen E. Seckler**

Congratulations! You survived one of the longest winters in the history of New England. "Soul sucking" was the way one Bostonian described the weather in May. But that is all past us now. Birds are chirping again. People are smiling. A renewed sense of optimism has returned to Beantown. It's time to get active.

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Summer in New England is our time to be outdoors having fun. But it is also a great time to focus on marketing and job-hunting activities. Although less hiring takes place in the summer, you are missing a great opportunity if you put networking activities off during July and August.

Similarly, while less business is transacted in the summer, the longer days and better weather

provide you with more chances to connect in person with potential referral sources.

First, a quick word for those of you who have just passed the bar exam in Massachusetts: Congratulations! Whether you are still looking for your first legal job, moved here from another jurisdiction or passed the bar on your second attempt, go out and celebrate. Passing the bar is one of those life accomplishments that will always be with you. Go out and enjoy the moment regardless of your current employment status. You deserve it.

** Summer is a good season for informational interviewing.*

If you are in a job hunt, it is easy to convince yourself to take off the summer. After all, no one is going to make a hiring decision before Labor Day. Too many partners are either on vacation or trying to get away for vacation.

While it is true that less hiring occurs in the summer months and that many people do take vacation in July and August, the summer is a good time for informational interviewing. Some of the lawyers you are trying to connect with will be away; but clients take vacations as well so some of your contacts will actually have *more* free time.

Take advantage of this situation and start scheduling time to meet with lawyers who are willing to speak with you about your search. Ask for career advice. Get feedback on your

resume. See if they can suggest others that might be worth calling. Inquire about project work. Ask questions about their practice and learn about their personal interests.

While many firms find it difficult to focus on hiring in the summer, July and August are a time for strategic planning. If you schedule informational interviews in this season, you will have much more momentum in your job hunt going into the fall. You will already be on the radar screen of the firms who are thinking about expanding. You will already have some leads when September arrives.

** Summer is an ideal season for connecting.*

Today's mantra about marketing legal services is "relationship building." There are many ways to build professional relationships throughout the year. Some lawyers like to get involved in nonprofit activities or trade associations. Some lawyers who are successful at generating business like to do public speaking, publish professional articles and send things to people on their mailing lists.

Others are actively involved in their community or their alumni associations. Still others have outside interests like music or wine collecting that give them the chance to interact with other professionals.

Since many organized activities slow down in the summer months, it is easy to take off from marketing in the summer. But July and August are great months for social activities.

Even if you have no interest in being on a golf course, it is much easier to find ways to connect in person in nice weather. Do lunch or coffee at an outdoor cafe. Invite some business prospects over to your house for a barbecue. Take someone fishing or hiking.

Call people you have been getting to know through your non-profit activities and get together with them so you can learn more about their companies. Find ways to be helpful. Reconnect with old college friends and law school classmates.

Certainly many people will be on vacation. But many will not, and once again, people tend to be much more open in warmer weather.

If your workload slows down in the summer and you are not big on socializing, find a marketing project that you have not had time for during the year. Write an article on some practical issue that your clients might face.

Go through your list of contacts and put them into an electronic contact manager. Learn how to use the contact manager. Design a client seminar that you might present in the fall. Contact organizations who might be looking for speakers and make a proposal.

** Don't forget to take your own summer vacation.*

While summer can be a good chance to build marketing or job hunting momentum, setting aside some time for vacation is also good for your career. If you are in a job hunt, you may feel guilty taking time off from the search. A better way to think about vacation time is that it is a chance to recharge your battery and do something that makes you feel good about yourself.

If you cannot afford to go anywhere, try taking day trips or spend time at the many attractions that are close to home. Work on a project that has been on the back burner for months (e.g., put all your old family photos in albums, organize your digital music collection, catch up on reconciling your old bank statements, read a good book, take a long bike ride, brush up on your piano playing and take a few lessons, do some gardening).

Having a sense of accomplishment in your personal life will help your self-esteem during your job hunt. If you do anything interesting or go anywhere interesting, you will have more to talk about when you do have interviews.

Recharging your battery and doing something for yourself will also help you project more confidence when you are out meeting with potential clients and referral sources. Having interests outside of the law will make it easier for you to connect with other professionals and could serve as the common ground for building a relationship that ultimately yields business.

Summer is no longer the sleepy season that it once was. Many lawyers who are busy during the year remain very busy throughout the traditional slow months. In my own view, this is an unfortunate byproduct of a highly competitive marketplace and at best, an unhealthy situation that can lead to burnout.

But if you are fortunate enough to have some additional time on your hands in the next two months, think of it as an opportunity to set the stage for a productive fall. Just make sure that you don't miss the best season that New England has to offer. Winter is just around the corner!

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