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SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN • TIPS & TACTICS FOR NEW LAWYERS

## Become a Visible and Valuable Asset

**W**hen you first enter private practice, you'll quickly find that many associates end up getting drudge work. Yet there can still be a discrepancy in the quality of available assignments. Some will be better or more interesting than others. Supervising lawyers also will vary in how influential they are in getting good clients and good assignments to delegate. Here are strategies to increase your chances of receiving the best possible assignments and being seen as a successful associate.

### ■ Be reliable and resourceful.

When receiving and carrying out assignments, ask enough questions to clarify the objectives, deadlines, level of detail desired, preferred method of delivery, and amount of time expected or not to exceed. As you proceed with the assignment, though, don't waste the supervising lawyer's time with repeated, unnecessary questions when you can easily get answers elsewhere, for example, from support staff or online research.



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■ **Be independent but not a loose cannon.** Admit when you don't know something or can't find the answer. You'll be perceived as arrogant or overconfident if you plow ahead and make mistakes because you're afraid to admit when your skill level is limited.

■ **Seek out good assignments.** Don't just wait and hope to get the next great assignment. If there are certain lawyers who seem to generate the type of work that interests you, introduce yourself and indicate your interest in getting involved in the work they're doing for clients.

■ **Observe and emulate success.** Observe other lawyers in the firm, especially those who are considered successful. Pay careful attention to how they behave, their interpersonal skills and their work style. Don't get dragged down by others who get caught up in the rumor mill or who tend to grouse a lot. Seek out mentors who will be candid with you about the firm's goals, strengths and weaknesses, and how you can successfully navigate the shoals.

■ **Take initiative early.** Show an interest in how the firm runs as a business, what the partners' goals and priorities are, and how the firm sets itself apart. Offer to help with projects in areas where you have a special interest or skill, such as technology, human resources, recruiting, marketing and community involvement.

By taking a proactive role in

attracting good assignments and building positive relationships with successful lawyers in the firm, you give others the correct impression that you are hardworking, independent and responsibly assertive. LP

## Checklist

### Steps to Early Success

- While focusing on honing your legal skills and their practical application, begin assessing the work you are being assigned and the supervising lawyers who are assigning it.
- Observe successful lawyers in the firm. If you share some of their traits and have a desire to succeed at the firm, try to emulate some of their success strategies.
- Seek out interesting assignments and clients, even if it means putting in some extra hours over the weekend to help work on a file.
- Make sure your work gets done on time and in the manner requested.
- Admit when you don't know something, and find out who to turn to for answers or relevant resources.
- Develop a few good mentors who will be candid sounding boards and will steer you in the right direction for exposure to interesting client work and leadership opportunities.