

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR SUMMER IN A LARGE LAW FIRM

Career Development Office



1. **Have a positive attitude.** The summer is your opportunity to demonstrate that you are eager to work hard and excited to be working at the firm. You'll have the chance to learn a great deal and work with some talented attorneys. Enjoy the experience – try a variety of assignments and meet as many attorneys as possible. Even if you end up working on one or two projects that you don't find interesting, try to maintain an upbeat demeanor. By focusing on the positive, you'll make a good impression on your colleagues, and, hopefully, develop relationships that will last throughout your career.
2. **Meet all deadlines.** It is important to establish yourself as a summer associate who can be relied on to meet deadlines. When you are given an assignment, be sure to ask by what date the project needs to be completed. Budget enough time to meet that deadline. If something unexpected occurs and you think you might miss the due date, call the assigning attorney as soon as possible and explain the situation. Never let a deadline pass and hope no one notices.
3. **Sweat the details.** Make sure that all your work, whether it is an e-mail to an associate or a memorandum to a senior partner, is accurate and precise. In addition to being accurate, all of your written work should look professional and be easy to read. Remember that every written assignment you produce will be scrutinized. You want to build your reputation as a summer associate that attorneys can rely on for high quality work.
4. **Proofread, proofread, proofread!** Always remember to proofread your assignments before you turn them in. Typos undermine your credibility as a reliable summer associate. Plus, you never know when a memo may go straight to a client!
5. **Get to know the support staff.** Make an effort to meet the support staff and be kind and courteous to everyone, including the legal assistants situated near you. The support staff will have a great deal of experience that will be valuable to you.
6. **Return calls promptly.** Always return all business calls you receive the same day. Whether the call is from a client or a junior associate, return the call as soon as you can.
7. **Understand your assignments before leaving the supervising attorney's office.** Make sure you have a complete understanding of the legal issues. Also, clarify your role. Does the supervising attorney want you to write a memo or to report back to her orally? Ask about the use of computer research tools – you really do not want to be the summer associate who billed a client \$35,000 for using Lexis (and there always is one!). Ask if other associates are on the same project, as they may prove to be a good resource to you. Ask for samples of the type of work you are doing – or find them yourself by searching the firm's document database. While many firms have internal libraries of sample documents, it may still be helpful to find a few samples prepared by the particular attorney with whom you are working. Always ask for a deadline and the approximate number of billable hours to spend on an assignment.
8. **Don't be afraid to ask questions.** As a project progresses, you may have additional questions to ask the assigning attorney. Do not hesitate to go back to that attorney and ask your questions. You do not want to spend hours "spinning your wheels" or "going down the wrong track."
9. **Keep the attorneys you are working with updated on your progress.** Let your supervising attorney know how your assignment is progressing. Discuss what issues have arisen and how much time you are spending on the project. Some attorneys like receiving updates in person. Others prefer e-mails or voice-mails. Try to determine your supervising attorney's preferred method of communication as soon as possible.
10. **Prioritize your work and know your limits.** If you are working on several projects at once, make sure you complete the ones with the most urgent deadlines first. Do not take on so much work that you feel overwhelmed, but be prepared to work hard.

11. **It is okay to say “I’ll get back to you” if you don’t know the answer.** You don’t want to give inaccurate information to either another attorney or a client. If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t guess. Tell the attorney that you’ll get back to her and take the time to research the answer and get it right. No one expects a summer associate to be able to answer legal questions off the top of her head.

12. **Ask for feedback.** Attorneys are almost always busy, and many are too busy to stop by your office to review the memo you’ve written. Take charge and ask for feedback. Constructive criticism will help you become a better attorney. If an attorney is not satisfied with your work, it is better to find out at the beginning of the summer rather than at the end. That way you have time to improve your work and leave a good impression.

13. **Try a variety of work assignments.** As a summer associate, you may have the opportunity to work in several different departments of the firm. Take advantage of this and work on many different types of assignments. If possible, take on at least one assignment that results in a written work product, such as drafting a research memo. Even if you are positive that you want to be a real estate attorney, work on a few litigation assignments. This will expand your own practical legal knowledge and provide you with valuable contacts in many legal departments – contacts which will be helpful to you if you return as an associate.

14. **Involve yourself in firm activities.** Most likely, your firm will have many social events planned for the summer associates. Participating in these events shows your interest in the firm and provides you with the opportunity to meet many associates and partners. While it is usually not necessary to attend all of these events, attend as many as you can. Also, remember that you are basically “on an interview” all summer, so you must always conduct yourself in a professional manner.

15. **Find a mentor and a buddy.** Sometimes you may be assigned a mentor and/or a buddy (usually a younger associate to ask your “silly” questions to). These attorneys can be valuable resources for you. Take advantage of them. Stop by their offices to ask a question or schedule a lunch and get to know them better. They may be busy and forget to call you, so you should take the initiative. In other cases, you may develop your own mentor/mentee relationships with attorneys with whom you connect. Whether it is part of a formal program or in an informal context, try to develop a good relationship with a couple of attorneys whom you respect and would be comfortable speaking with about your career path, as well as about sensitive work issues that may arise.

16. **Be aware of your billable hours.** A law firm is a business and billable hours lead to its revenue. While you may be told not to worry about your billable hours during your summer, it is still likely that your hours will be reviewed and you do not want to be viewed as a “slacker.”

17. **Stay organized.** You will be receiving numerous documents, e-mails and voice-mails. Set up a filing system for your documents. You do not want to be heading into a meeting with a partner and realize you have misplaced an important letter from a client. Keep copies of all the work you produce. Make it a habit to complete your time sheets daily.

18. **Establish “work practices” with your legal assistant.** It’s important for you to establish a good working relationship with your legal assistant. Often legal assistants have a great deal of experience with firm procedures and can help you make a smooth transition into firm life. Consider inviting your legal assistant out to lunch and asking him about his work. How can he help you be more efficient? Will learning to use a dictaphone be beneficial? How does he want you to distinguish between urgent and non-urgent assignments?

19. **Your legal assistant should always know where you are.** If you are going to be out of the office, leave a number where you can be reached. Having lunch out of the office or attending a meeting at another firm? Let your assistant know.

20. **Keep in touch with SULLS Career Development Office.** Our office is open all summer and we would like to hear from you! We are available to answer any questions or discuss any concerns you may have. Call us at (617) 573-8148.