

# KEEP THAT JOB

NOW THAT YOU'VE GOT IT

**L**egal employers invest tremendous resources in the recruitment and retention of their attorneys. Beyond the lavish recruitment dinners, significant dollars are earmarked to ensure your professional development.

Senior level professionals have been added to administrative staffs to identify career development benchmarks, oversee work assignments, design training curriculums and CLE programs and develop mentor programs. There are so many resources available to you!

And yet at the same time, many things appear to be beyond your control when you are a junior attorney. You are assigned a secretary, given assignments and operate on someone's timetable.

Such external realities can create a detrimental mindset and cause junior associates to simply resign themselves to accept that they have no control over their

The steps that will make you the associate that your firm wants to retain are the same ones you need to take to begin developing your own career.

BY KATHLEEN BRADY

guess what? Doing so is precisely what will make you a "keeper" in the eyes of your employer.

So—here's what to do. Learn to take advantage of all of your firm's available resources; to control the things you can; and to develop strategies to cope with those you cannot. Your success hinges on your actions.

**1. Recognize that technical competence is critical.** Continually learn the law. Attend CLEs and training programs offered by your employer. Deliver complete,

time, and no responsibility for their experience or professional development. Such passive resignation is a sure fire way to sabotage your career.

You have the power to create the career—and ultimately, the life—you want as long as you are willing to take responsibility for your own career development. And

high quality work on time every time and always give 110 percent in your day-to-day responsibilities. When you do that, you develop a reputation for being reliable and dependable.

Whether or not your firm has established formal benchmarks, benchmark your progress against your colleagues. If others appear to be getting more sophisticated work, ask yourself why. Is it because you have not proven yourself to be reliable? Is your substantive work not up to par?

Answers to these questions can help you see yourself through the eyes of your superiors and enable you to address issues before they become insurmountable. And, before you assume there is some great conspiracy by the power structure to sabotage your career, determine how your behavior may be contributing to the situation and try to correct that first.

Continually seek opportunities to learn through professional reading, training programs and seminars and conferences. Oftentimes your employer will pay for outside conferences. Take advantage of everything provided to you. And even if such perks are not provided, pay for them yourself. Think of dollars spent addressing skill or knowledge gaps as an investment in career security.

**2. Align your goals with those of the organization and your boss.** Think about what keeps your boss up at night and attach yourself to the projects, people and areas that will enable you to contribute in a way that makes that person's life easier.

Read the firm's daily newsletter and new client matter memos to stay on top of what is happening at the organization and how you can contribute to its success. The trick is to create and understand your value to the boss and the organization while remaining true to yourself.

**3. Pay attention to economic forces and world events.** Today's business world is changing constantly. As a consequence, legal employers want attorneys who are up-to-date not only in their practice area but also in the world around them.

The Internet makes it easy to stay abreast of marketplace trends, and skill sets that need to be acquired, in order to ensure employability. Use databases containing information about industry trends, specific company profiles, etc. Visit trade or professional associations as well as alumni sites. Sign up for industry news alerts through professional associations or sites such as Law.com. Ten minutes a day is all the time you need to invest in such activities.

As useful as the Internet is, though, you cannot hide behind your computer screen. You need to talk to people.

People are the single most valuable resource in your career development. They have more current, detailed and accurate information about what is happening in your organization and the world of work than any Web site, book or article ever can.

It is extremely important to use these relationships to broaden your field of vision in order to make informed, smart decisions. You can learn about upcoming assignments and projects, pro bono opportunities, career paths you never thought about, market rates, shifts in business practices and industry trends, etc. Talk to others lawyers as well as the administrative staff. Think about all the people you met during the recruiting process; they have a vested interest in your success.

**4. Establish mentor relationships.** If your firm offers a formal mentor program, be sure to participate. However, don't rely solely on formalized mentor programs to blossom into full-fledged relationships, or hope that people will notice you and offer to take you under their wings. It isn't enough. Solid mentoring relationships evolve naturally, not through administration.

Create your own personal support system or "Board of Advisors" to tap during periods of assessment and transition. Establishing a network of mentors will allow you to learn from different styles, develop a range of skills and consider various perspectives of an issue.

The key to successful mentor relationships is your willingness to work hard and make the relationships worthwhile for the mentors because of your enthusiasm and commitment. A mentor is not someone who solves all your problems; you should not burden anyone with such a responsibility. Think of mentors as resources to help you plan and execute your career goals and help you navigate difficult situations.

Mentor relationships are the primary stepping stone to building professional

networks. Mentors can introduce you to people within your organization whom you need to know. You then rely on your skills and experience to impact what work gets done. But knowing how work gets done within an organization depends upon the network of relationships that exist.

Network internally to increase the chances of making an impression on decision-makers; monitor the rumor mill and learn about departments beyond your own. Volunteer for committee assignments; attend firm events; eat lunch in the cafeteria. Be sure to establish a presence within your organization.

Develop, use and nurture relationships continuously. Keep in touch with people you meet throughout your career; don't wait until you "need" something from them.

Establish a reputation for being helpful. Pass along useful information; introduce contacts to people in your network who might be helpful to them.

Always look for ways to build bridges. People will remember your thoughtfulness and will be likely to return the favor.

You are completely responsible for what you bring into every relationship and for what you project onto other people. Perception is reality.

Think about how other people see you. If you look and act like a loser, or someone who does not belong, that is exactly how people will respond to you. Your facial expression, posture and willingness to launch conversations matter.

Dress and behave like a professional; be positive and upbeat; project a proud, confident image. Radiate confidence and people will be naturally drawn to you in every situation throughout your career. That will help to ensure that you have limitless resources in place when you need them.

**5. Shamelessly self-promote your contributions.** Doing good work is essential. Equally important is ensuring that people know you do good work. It is your responsibility to bring that information to light.

Who you know is always important, but who knows you is even more important. That does not mean that you need to turn into an arrogant, boastful creep. It simply means that you need to be comfortable talking about what your contributions are.

In order to do that, catalogue your experiences and successes as they happen. On an ongoing basis, maintain a file that includes the following information:

- the substantive nature of the work performed and the percentage of time spent on each category;
  - significant accomplishments;
  - clients for which you did a substantial amount of work or the major projects you worked on;
  - professional and community activities—include internal (recruiting, CLEs, etc.) as well as external activities (speaking engagements, articles written, conventions and seminars attended, bar activities, community activities, etc.)
- This information should be used in preparation for your annual performance review.

Your performance review is not something that happens to you; you must be an active participant. Prepare a personal "Annual Report," to be included in your personnel file, containing the information you've gathered throughout the year. As you prepare this report, also ask yourself the following questions:

- Is my workload insufficient, satisfactory, or too much?
- Am I receiving a sufficient variety of assignments to enable me to grow as a lawyer? If not, what can I do to address the issue?
- Have I had regular opportunities to discuss my work with supervisors? If not, what could I have done differently to get needed feedback?
- Have I received and acted on supervisors' suggestions for improving my work?
- Am I satisfied with my development as a lawyer within the organization? If not, in what areas would I like to improve?
- What are my goals for the next year? In what areas would I like to improve and what is my action plan to accomplish this?

Seize control of your own career development. Take advantage of the plethora of resources your legal employer makes available to you. Remember, you have the power; you just need to use it.

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