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***“J.D. Preferred:” Using your Legal Skillset to Succeed in Alternative Settings  
January 7th, 2016 Panel Recap***

By Daniella Isaacson\*

In January 2016, the Committee on Career Advancement and Management hosted a panel focused on “alternative, non-traditional or JD Advantage/Preferred” career paths for J.D.s. The panel was moderated by Daniella Isaacson, Senior Analyst at ALM Legal Intelligence and featured Wendy Siegel, Director of New York University School of Law’s Office of Career Planning, Amelia Walianny, Manager of Strategic Partnerships and Product Implementation at Kinolved, Nick Canedo, Manager of Major Gifts at the Rainforest Alliance, Steve Kovalan, Senior Analyst at ALM Legal Intelligence, and Ryan Trinkle, Partner at Obsidian Systems.

The stated goal of the panel, as introduced by moderator Daniella Isaacson, was to “open up a discourse on so-called ‘J.D. Preferred’ careers and what that means.” Panelists concurred “J.D. Preferred” means any job as long as you can sell your skillset and background. While currently there may be some stigma attached to a non-traditional career, and some hardships associated with explaining your background to non-traditional legal employers, the payoffs to both the job seeker and the employer are immense and, as every panelist related, their legal background was valued in their career.

Panelists introduced best practices from their experience, including the following:

1) Connect with your personal network

Talk to friends and family. Panelists agreed that family members and friends are a resource not just for potential jobs and connections to those in the industry you are interested in pursuing, but also to assist in finding potential industries of interest. Moderator Daniella Isaacson recounted her personal experiences asking friends and family members to suggest jobs based on their knowledge of her background and personality, leading her to the consulting industry.

2) Network with those in the industry

Panelists recommended networking with those in the industry, particularly, joining networking associations of industries you are interested in pursuing. Panelist Nick Canedo, when looking for a job in non-profit fundraising, joined a professional association for fundraising professionals.

3) Don’t be afraid to take something ‘beneath your level’

Panelist Steve Kovalan discussed his journey from calendar salesman post-law school, to customer service representative at Thomson Reuters, to Senior Analyst at ALM Legal Intelligence. He counseled an audience member with questions on if to take a job doing cold-calling to think about your skillset and take the position if it feels like a stepping stone to something bigger. Panelist Ryan Trinkle concurred, explaining that the startup environment is malleable and it is possible to climb up the ladder quickly. He also counseled that it is a good idea to start networking for the next position as soon as you get the job.

4) LinkedIn is your friend

Use LinkedIn to job search and make personal connections industry professionals. Panelists agreed that LinkedIn is critical in networking, and should be updated frequently. Panelists counseled getting in touch with strangers and friends of friends in industries of interest.

5) Cover letters and resumes should be tailored – every time you apply

Panelist Wendy Siegel counseled attendees to tailor both resumes and cover letters every time you apply to a new position. In particular, she recommended the cover letter as an outlet for explain further who you are and how your legal experience would transition well into a non-traditional job.

6) Drink coffee

Panelists agreed that casual sit downs with contacts in the industry can be invaluable as a way to get further information on the person's career path and their experiences in getting the position, as well as tips and tricks on applying in the industry. Moderator Daniella Isaacson further recommended not forgetting to follow up with those contacts later.

7) Bulk up your knowledge

Panelists counseled reading books and bulking up knowledge on unfamiliar industries of interest. Panelist Amelia Waliany recounted her personal experience in transitioning from the NYC Department of Education to 'EdTech' (Education Technology), by taking a coding course at General Assembly and using that as leverage, in conjunction with her legal background, to find a job in the industry.

8) Rejection is the name of the game

Panelists agreed that the odds are not forever in your favor. Panelist Steve Kovalan was even rejected from his fictional application to Panelist Ryan Trinkle's tech startup. Ryan counseled attendees to take rejection in stride and not to think about the rejection as something personal, but rather, to make the job process a numbers game. Rank the top 5 companies or jobs that are of interest to you as the job-applicant and then apply to 5 jobs every day.

9) You still might get that job you're waiting on, but don't act like you will

Panelist Nick Canedo told the story of an applicant to Rainforest Alliance who had been passed over for a position, and had reached out to him via LinkedIn for a new posting. He was impressed by her tenacity and considered her for that new job. Panelist Ryan Trinkle agreed, explaining that he never sends rejection letters since he often goes back to the pile of resumes if a new job opens up the next day. He recommended continuing to apply to other positions in the meantime.

10) Be convincing

As Panelist Wendy Siegel counseled, you have a background that is exceptional and unique to non-traditional employers. A J.D., and perhaps, a bar membership, are impressive accomplishments in and of themselves and should not be discounted when job searching. It may take more time to find the job you are looking for when trying to break into an industry unfamiliar with your legal background, but it is your job to convince employers to understand the value-add of your skillset.

*\*Daniella Isaacson is a Senior Analyst at ALM Legal Intelligence and a member of the City Bar's Career Advancement and Management Committee, January 2016.*