



Thinking about a Career in Criminal Law?

10 Helpful Tips

On a January morning, six distinguished City Bar criminal practice attorneys shared their perspective on the life and role of criminal law attorneys at the *Career Opportunities in Criminal Law* program. The overarching sentiment from the program was that the Criminal Bar is both small and friendly, so it is paramount that you are always professional and courteous as your approach your work and your colleagues, no matter from which side of the aisle they advocate.

Below are 10 helpful tips from this terrific program, which was moderated by Pooja Bansal, General Counsel, Brooklyn Borough President (formerly, ADA, Bronx County). Panelists included: Marcus Asner, Arnold & Porter LLP; Roberta Baldini, Chief of Investigations for the Office of Internal Oversight, United Nations; Todd Blanche, Assistant U.S. Attorney, Southern District of New York; Ben Fischer, Morvillo Abramowitz, Grand, Iason, Anello & Bohrer, P.C.; and Zachary Margulis-Ohnuma, Law Office of Zachary Margulis-Ohnuma

1. **You Must Be a People-Person.**

Careers in criminal law – compared to transactional law, for example – often involve speaking to or interacting with people. If you do not enjoy heavy interaction with people, then this field may not be for you.

2. **Versatility will Serve You Well.**

Be ready to engage with people from many different backgrounds. You might engage with a judge, defense counsel, prosecutors, clients, witnesses, court clerks, police officers, FBI/DEA agents all in one day. Be prepared to shift your conversation as well as how you interact.

3. **Learn to Write Well.**

Strong writing skills may impact the outcome for your client. Some might think: Not a careful writer = Not a careful lawyer.

4. **Drink Up Life.**

Criminal practice is very fact intensive, so it's good practice to pay attention to details in stories we hear and read each day. Such curiosity may serve as good training if you choose to practice criminal law.

5. **Read the Newspaper.**

Remember that thing called the newspaper. Well, pick it up and read it. Learn which cases prosecutors bring, common defenses raised, and crimes that are happening in the jurisdiction that interests you.

6. It's Not All About Winning.

Don't enter criminal practice with the idea that it's all about winning. Sometimes it can be hard for you to feel that you've "won," notwithstanding a favorable verdict.

7. Profound Stakes = Stress is Part of the Job.

In criminal practice, you may be speaking with someone on the worst day of his or her life, and you have been tapped to make things better. Mistakes will keep you up at night and can have profound effects.

8. You Will Constantly Disappoint People.

No matter the result—not guilty, plea, settle, life sentence—someone in the equation is typically disappointed with the outcome and will let you know.

9. Pro Bono Work

Get involved in pro bono work that allows you to see what it's like to be a prosecutor or defense lawyer. You will gain an understanding of the stakes involved and whether criminal practice appeals to you. Remember that your reputation precedes you, so be competent and work as hard as you can.

10. The Lawyer's Role

Your role is to tell the best understanding of the truth and let the judge or jury decide.

Review written by Courtney Fitzgibbons, Senior Director of Career Planning at New York Law School and Chair of the Career Advancement and Management Committee, February 2013.