

### CAREER COUNSELING FOR FIRST-YEAR ASSOCIATES

**F**irst-year associates in a law firm must know more than simply the latest SEC rulings and recent tax regulations. In fact, navigating day-to-day office politics and administrative duties, which many are facing for the first time, can be their greatest challenge. To help first-year associates stay on course, the New York City Bar brought together a panel of senior associates from New York City's top law firms to discuss how to avoid common first-year missteps in these areas. Panelists included Florence Beauboeuf from O'Melveny & Myers LLP, Jessica Cohen from Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, Morris Massel from Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP, Meghan McCurdy from White & Case LLP and Joshua Sussberg from Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP. Below are some of the issues discussed and the panel's advice based on their own varied experience.

**Q:**

*You receive an e-mail asking you and several other associates whether you are available to take on additional work. Believing you are responding only to the assigning partner, with whom you have a close mentoring relationship, you explain that you cannot because a certain senior associate at the firm (whom you name) has been overloading you with "busy work." Unfortunately you hit "reply all," how do you control the fall-out?*

**A:**

A direct conversation with the senior associate (although awkward) is the best course of action. It is always better to be proactive, and it is never good to let a situation fester. Two

other thoughts: (i) never say anything disparaging in an e-mail, and (ii) "reply all" is very dangerous.

**Q:**

*You are at the printer and notice an error that, based on your quick assessment, should not impact the document or the deal. How should you handle this situation?*

**A:**

If you are not the ultimate decision maker, disclosure is the key. Point it out to the senior associate/partner in charge offering suggestions on how best to fix the problem. Keep in mind you may not be in a position to fully assess the ramifications of the purported error.

**Q:**

*You are scheduled to take depositions in Dayton with a partner and have enough frequent flier miles to upgrade to first class. Do you upgrade and, if so, do you inform the partner first?*

**A:**

Follow the partner's and the client's lead. It is very awkward to sit in first class while the client paying you is sitting in the rear. If the partner is upgrading, then it is probably acceptable for you to do the same. Moreover, traveling with a partner provides a great opportunity to discuss not only the matter but also your career. You should take advantage of this time to develop the relationship and remember in many ways the senior partner is effectively your client as well.

**Q:**

*When in Dayton who pays for cabs, lunch, etc.?*

**A:**

Be prepared with sufficient cash on hand so you can always offer to pay first. Some partners like the junior people to pay for everything and other partners will not let anyone pay for anything.

**Q:**

*During holidays, who should you tip and how much?*

**A:**

It is always a good idea to give a gift to your assistant to show your appreciation. Unfortunately, the practice of holiday gifting varies a lot even within firms, so it is best to consult a few trusted sources. When in doubt, be generous.

**Q:**

*A billion-dollar deal just closed. The partner takes all of the associates out for drinks to celebrate. The paralegals and assistants, who also worked really hard to close the deal, are not invited. How should you show your appreciation?*

**A:**

You should always express gratitude for a job well done. Whether that is in the form of a night out or a box of cookies is up to you. Gratitude builds loyalty, and it is never too early to start.

**Q:**

*Your big deal is scheduled to close next Monday and you have an out-of-town family wedding on Saturday. What do you do?*

**A:**

Inform the senior associate on the deal and suggest remedies, such as having one of your colleagues agree to cover for you if necessary. Generally, people recognize the importance of family gatherings. In the end it will most likely be your decision, so be prepared to face the consequences, either with your partner or your Aunt Suzie.

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