HOW TO SURVIVE/SUCCEED AS A SUMMER INTERN

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• **Dress conservatively.** Regardless of what the lawyers in the organization usually wear, you should still dress conservatively. Remember they have permanent jobs; you’re trying to get one.

• **Arrive early on the first day.** If you plan to arrive 15 minutes early, you’re almost assured not to be late, no matter what traffic jams or other disasters besiege you.

• **Receiving assignments.**
  - **Be prepared.** When summoned to attorney’s office, always bring a writing pad and a writing utensil (pen or pencil).
  - **Take notes.** No matter how simple the task appears to be, take notes.
  - **Ask questions when you don’t understand.** It’s better to clear up misunderstandings from the beginning rather than trying to do it later (when the assigning attorney may not be available).

  • **Ask logistical questions such as—**
    - When would you like the final product? What’s the deadline?
    - Would you like to touch base in the interim?
    - In what form should the final product be (an oral report, a memo, a brief, an e-mail)?
    - Where do you suggest that I start my research (a treatise, Westlaw/Lexis, the Internet, the Federal Register, etc.)?
    - Is the client sensitive about on-line research charges?
    - If you’re not available and I have a question, is there someone else in the office that is familiar with the matter?
    - Do you have a model that I could use as a template for my finished product?

  • **Review your notes.** After you receive the assignment, go back to your office and review your notes to see if you have any more questions about the assignment.
• Follow up. Consider sending an e-mail to the assigning attorney summarizing your understanding of the assignment, giving the attorney the opportunity to refine the assignment or to clear up any misunderstandings.

• Keep lines of communication open. Even if the attorney says that it’s not necessary to check in with her, be sure to communicate with her when you think you’ve hit a dead end in your research, have new questions, or think you could benefit from further discussion about what the attorney wants.

• Turning in the Assignment.

• Meet deadlines. Strive to meet deadlines. In the unfortunate event that you realize that you’re not going to meet a deadline, let your supervising attorney know immediately.

• Use desired form of presentation. If the assigning attorney appears approachable, just before turning in the assignment, ask how he or she would like the finished project presented (in a three-ring binder; as an attachment to an e-mail, etc.). Otherwise, ask junior lawyers or the assigning attorney’s secretary about the way the attorney likes to receive finished products.

• Neatness counts. Present a neat package. Be sure to use staples, paper clips, binder clips, folders, three-ring binders, etc. as needed. Do not use Post-it notes unless explicitly asked. They make the product look sloppy and unprofessional. Post-it flags are better, but use sparingly.

• Be careful with notes appended to the finished product. If you need to add a note to the finished product, use the organization’s note stationary or regular paper and type the note as if a short memo (Date, To, From, Re, Message).

• Signing letterhead. Occasionally you may send a letter or fax under your own signature. Because you are not yet a member of the bar, check with the assigning attorney about how you should sign your name, i.e., John Student, Law Clerk. The rules of the bar and the organization determine your mode of signature.

• Working with Support Staff.

• Treat them well. Support staff members are crucial to the success of any organization. Always be courteous and respectful when interacting with support staff. They can help make your experience a great one or a difficult one.

• Invaluable resources. Support staff members are valuable sources of information with respect to procedures in the office. They can answer questions are expense reporting, photocopiers, mail drops, etc. They can also tell you important facts about the people you’re working with, such as, “He gets into work early” (so you should make sure you finish your assignment the night before) or “She prefers e-mails over telephone calls”.

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• **Establish a rapport.** Sometime during the first few weeks of the summer consider inviting your secretary out to lunch to get to know him/her better. (You can do this in conjunction with other summer associates or lawyers in the office.)

• **Give them deadlines.** It’s important to let the staff member know when you’d like the work completed. If you don’t say, they won’t assume necessarily that you need it ASAP. They may assume that they can get to the work whenever it’s convenient for them, or worse yet, they won’t work on it until you ask them about it later.

• **Your Work; Your Responsibility.**
  
  • **For better or for worse, it’s yours.** Though it is important to seek assistance from others (support staff, other attorneys, paralegals, etc.), remember that in the end, you are responsible for your work product. For example, typographical errors on an assignment you turn in are not your secretary’s, they are yours. Faxing the wrong document to the client is your error, not the paralegal’s or the fax department’s.

  • **Paralegals are not lawyers.** Though paralegals often know more about the matter than you do and may have a great deal of experience, you were hired because you are in training to be a lawyer. Treat the paralegal with respect and listen to what he/she says, but remember, you’re the summer intern.

  • **Protecting your client’s information.** Be careful whenever discussing client matters outside of the office. Whether you’re in a taxi cab, on your cell phone, or on the elevator, you must guard your client’s information at all times. Also, be careful with the use of e-mail. If you use lists, make sure you intend to send the particular e-mail to all the people on the list. Also, ask your organization about its document retention policy so that you may comply with it during the summer.

• **Social Events.**
  
  • **Should you attend?** Deciding whether to attend social events is sometimes a fine line to walk. Attend at least fifty percent of the social events during the summer. Feel out the culture of the organization with respect attendance expectations. Sometimes you’ll need to decline invitations because of work obligation or family/friend obligations and lawyers will understand, but these are opportunities for you get to know other members of the organization with whom you may not get to work over the summer and a chance for them to get to know you.

  • **Work comes first.** Having attended a social event the night before is never a justification for giving a supervising attorney a substandard final product or for turning it in late.

  • **No dancing on tables.** Be careful with your behavior, in particular alcohol consumption. Remember your goal is to be offered a permanent position and you dancing on the table with a lamp shade on your head may not be your best selling point.
• Lunch Invitations.

• See “Social Events” above. Many of the same rules apply to lunch invitations. If working in a large firm, it is customary that the firm pays for lunch. In smaller firms or non-profits, find out the norms before going to a 5-star restaurant. 😊

• Be proactive. If you find that you’re not being asked out to lunch as much as you’d like, talk to your mentor about it or the hiring coordinator in personnel/human resources. Consider asking lawyers out to lunch yourself.

• Include senior lawyers. Don’t forget also to ask senior members of the organization out to lunch to talk about their practice areas, the vision for the future of the organization, etc. These lawyers often don’t think about lunch until late in the day, but if you ask to get on their calendars, they are often quite happy to take you out to lunch.

• Do Not Refuse (at least not directly) an Assignment Because You’re Too Busy.

• If you find that you have too much work to do, do not directly refuse a new assignment. Let the attorney know that you’d love to work on the project and it sounds really interesting, but make him aware that you are concerned about whether you can devote enough time to the matter. Then volunteer to check with the other attorneys with which you’re working to make sure that you can take on this exciting project.

• Then call the other attorneys with whom you are working, explain the situation, and if you don’t want to take on the new project for whatever reason, walk through what you have remaining to do on the existing projects to bring home the idea that you don’t have time for another one.

• Ask the attorney with whom you’re already working to contact the attorney with the new assignment to say that you’d like to work on her project, but you just don’t have time.

• Work outside of the office. Occasionally you may be asked to attend a meeting outside of the office, conduct “due diligence” off-site, or even travel out of town. Remember that you are representing your organization and govern yourself accordingly.

• Be clear about expenses. Can you take a cab or should you take the subway? Is it ok to order room service? Can you travel in business class or should you go in coach?

• Bring food and water. In your briefcase, keep a bottle of water and a breakfast bar or something similar. When the work is intense, the senior lawyers may allow meal times to pass right by or you may be racing to catch a plane and don’t have time to get anything to eat. If you know you’ve got something with you, you can concentrate on the work and not your hunger pangs. 😊
• **Mentors.** If your organization does not have a formal mentor or buddy program (and even if it does), be on the look-out yourself for good people who appear to be confident, well-liked, and respected in the organization. Also, don’t feel as if you have to limit yourself to having one mentor. People have relative strengths and weaknesses in various areas and you can take advantage of several people’s strengths.

• **Be positive and enthusiastic.** No matter how the project is presented to you (it’s drudgery, not glamorous or sexy, time-consuming, etc.) be enthusiastic about the opportunity to work on it. I believe that most legal work is a combination of excitement and drudgery. Unfortunately, you often have to slog through the boring stuff to get to the good stuff.

• **Telephone Etiquette.**
  - Do not use your speakerphone unless the party on the line gives you permission to do and you have a good reason for doing so, such as needing your hands-free to go through documents.
  - If you are going to have more than a brief conversation on the speakerphone, close your door out of consideration for your neighbors.

• **Open-Door Policy.**
  - At most offices, attorneys keep their doors open unless they are on the speakerphone, having a personnel or personal discussion, or are having difficulty concentrating because of noise outside of their office and they have a deadline quickly approaching.
  - Keep your door open as much as possible to (a) follow the office culture and (b) let attorneys in the office know that you are open to them dropping in to ask you out to lunch, chat, or give you a new assignment.

• **Avoid office politics and gossip.** Try to stay neutral, excuse yourself situations where people are gossiping, and avoid people who trade in gossip.

• **Be honest. Be real.**

• **Remember the object of the game.** At the end of the summer, you want this employer to offer you a permanent position or invite you to spend part of next summer with the organization. Regardless of whether or not this turns out to be your dream job, you want options, experience, good recommendations, and proof that you are “hirable”. The average lawyer will hold five to eight jobs in the forty years between law school and retirement. You’ve just begun and you want to start on the right foot!