



Top 5 Summer Tips: Interacting with Firm's Clients, Attorneys, and Staff

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This practice note outlines five practical tips you can use as a summer associate to help you interact with the firm's clients, attorneys, and staff. You can accomplish a lot this summer: familiarize yourself with the type of work lawyers do day-to-day, decide which practice area might best suit you, make future connections for your career, and of course have a little fun while you're at it. But one of the most important things you need to do throughout the summer is to make a good impression. Without that, none of your other summer goals will be very successful. The following tips will help you interact with the various constituencies in your summer associate position to make a positive impression.

1. Communicate appropriately.

When communicating with attorneys and clients, you must know your audience. Get to know how people you work with prefer to communicate. Many clients in the modern age appreciate e-mails (more on this below) and most are comfortable communicating that way. However, you may have clients that prefer more verbal (e.g., phone) interaction and perhaps some clients prefer in-person meetings. Take the time to learn your client's preferred method of communication and adapt your behavior to these preferences. Ask other attorneys you work with about their knowledge of the clients to which you have been assigned.

Keep the same thought process when communicating with your fellow attorneys. Do they like you stopping by the office to discuss matters? Do they prefer arranging a set time to meet or are they comfortable with drop-in visits? Are e-mails sufficient?

Also pay attention to not just the mode of communication but the style and manner of your audience. Be formal in both written and verbal communication unless and until you get clear direction that being a bit more informal is okay, but always be professional as discussed below.

In regard to e-mails, all e-mails should be written professionally. Proofread them thoroughly. Don't just spell check. Spell check does not always catch typos. Make sure it relays all of the information required. Avoid using shorthand, abbreviations, or worse, an emoji. Work e-mails are not the same as texting with your friends: no LMK or LOL. Every e-mail should be fit for forwarding to a client or other attorneys (both in and outside the firm). And pay attention to REPLY TO ALL. Don't reply to all, unless you mean to REPLY TO ALL.

2. Be professional.

You are in a professional office setting. Exercise good manners and act professionally. Always look and act the part. If your firm has a business casual dress code, don't forget the BUSINESS part. Always keep more formal business attire in the office in case an unexpected meeting, court appearance, or firm event arises. You don't want to lose an opportunity to participate in a new

learning experience because you are not dressed appropriately.

In meetings, put your phone away. Do not get distracted by answering texts or e-mails either in meetings with your fellow attorneys or clients. These meetings are excellent learning opportunities for you. You may miss out on important aspects of the matter to which you are assigned if you do not stay focused because you are busy answering e-mails.

Whenever you are in the office or at a work-related event (even social events), always remember that you remain in a professional setting. Act appropriately. Even during a coffee or lunch break, standing around the water cooler, or in the break room, you must maintain your sense of professionalism. Someone may always be watching or listening. You never know if clients are walking around the office. At social events, you are allowed to have fun, but remain professional. If alcohol is served, refrain from drinking to excess and losing control. It may reflect poorly on your character and the firm. Refrain from commenting about work on social media outlets.

Most importantly, be aware of keeping client confidences. Don't discuss client matters in public settings, especially elevators.

3. Be prepared.

Remember these words: Follow up, follow up, follow up. When getting a new assignment, bring a pen and pad. Take notes, but don't be so methodical about taking notes that you are not paying attention to the instructions. Do NOT take notes on your phone. Keep your phone out of sight. When getting assignments, do not leave the office until you fully understand the assignment, the deadline, and in what format your work should be presented (e.g., memo, e-mail, outline, or verbal discussion). You might want to get an estimate of the time expected (hours billed) to complete the assignment as well. When juggling multiple assignments, be sure to plan your work days accordingly so you do not miss a deadline. And always follow up. Do not let issues linger. Stay in contact with your assigning attorney, your clients, and your colleagues. Try to return every phone call or e-mail before your work day ends. Don't be late for meetings (internal or external).

4. Ask questions: No question is a dumb question.

Never be afraid to ask one; however, knowing how and when you ask the question is critical. Do not leave the assigning attorney's office without asking questions that will enable you to get the assignment done correctly and on time. If questions arise during the assignment (and they always will) think about it first. Can you find the answer on your own? Can you ask your office mate? Your mentor? The associate working on the matter? Or does it need to be asked of the partner? Is it a question that needs an immediate answer or can it wait until you see the person responsible for the assignment? Think things through, then ask.

5. Create relationships that can last your entire career and beyond.

Find mentors and friends from all areas of the firm that can help guide you not only over the summer, but when you

return to the firm as a first-year associate or throughout your career. Find a mix of people that can support you. From junior associates, paralegals, partners, and support staff, find people you can trust and bond with, and people who can and will take an interest in your success and growth as an attorney. Don't limit your relationships to the practice group you are interested in. Network with attorneys and staff throughout the office and the firm. Also remember that networking is a two-way street: Try to assist and help others as well. Strong relationships are forged when you work and support each other.

Bonus tip: Don't forget the support staff. Be polite and respectful to the administrative and support staff. Your assistant, office operations, mail clerks, human resources department, research center, librarians, and copy room clerks, just to name a few, are key to your success. All of these people serve important roles in the firm. Show them all the same respect you give to the attorneys and clients. The support staff is the life-blood of the firm; they make all of our busy work lives easier and enable us to serve our clients well. Trust me—some, if not all of the support staff will save you more than once over the course of your career.



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John L. Mascialino heads the firm's New York Government Law & Policy Practice. He focuses his practice on administrative law, government affairs, government contracts, government investigations, and government-related real estate matters. John counsels private and publicly owned companies and not-for-profit organizations on state and local regulatory, legal, and policy matters with a focus on the clients' strategic objectives and provides advice on matters that will enhance their business opportunities in the city and state of New York.

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