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SUMMER ASSOCIATES

## Habits of Highly Effective Summers

*Be sociable, act professionally, sample multiple projects  
and focus on continual improvement.*

By Meaghan Chmura, Ian Fitzgerald, Frances Adkins and Santosh Aravind

**C**ongratulations again. Weeks of interviews and months of hard work have landed you in a law firm summer associate program.

Your months will be filled with new assignments, new faces and new professional opportunities, so make the most of it.

To get you started, we, a group of associates from Latham & Watkins, all of whom successfully graduated from a law firm summer program, offer our best tips for maximizing the experience.

### Step Right Up

The firm's attorneys want to meet you, and the summer program is designed to maximize your exposure. So don't be shy: Introduce yourself to both partners and associates, and make an effort to understand the firm's culture.



From left: Santosh Aravind, Frances Adkins, Meaghan Chmura and Ian Fitzgerald.

Successful summer associates use the firm's social events to interact and learn about other attorneys' experiences. Initiate social interaction whenever possible.

Ask the partner next door for coffee or grab a quick lunch with a junior associate after your team meeting. Practice group meetings or professional development

seminars offer opportunities to rub elbows with attorneys throughout the firm.

## The Worst Question Is the One Not Asked

Every new team member faces a learning curve. Many summer associates may not know the basic systems and processes of a law firm such as setting up a conference call or using firm-specific resources.

Don't worry! New jobs always require an adjustment period, and the best way through that is to ask questions. Recruiting staff, partners, junior associates and other summer associates are all resources to help when you have questions.

## Talk to Me

Getting feedback from your supervisors is always a good idea. Even if your summer program features a mid-summer review process, you should regularly solicit feedback directly from your supervisors.

By identifying areas for improvement early, you make the summer program a more effective training and learning experience, and give yourself an opportunity to fine-tune important skills. Attorneys appreciate it when you take the initiative, and you will make an impression with your positive response to constructive suggestions. Guidance from multiple sources, whether it's your official mentor or the person supervising you on a particular work assignment, should give you an overview on processes and standards.

Finally, focusing on constant improvement will ensure you end your summer on a high note, always the way to finish.

## First Impressions Count

You don't get a second chance to make a first impression. Focus on the little things that count towards making an impression as you enter the summer program.

These range from proofreading simple

e-mail messages to being prepared for every meeting. Pay attention to the details that often get overlooked: timeliness, personal appearance, active participation in meetings and quality control. Use good judgment, both professional and social. The effort will pay off not just in your work product but in your overall impression.

## Let's Get It Started in Here!

By mid-summer, recruiting events might start feeling less like fun-filled social engagements and more like an extension of the workday.

The true professionals in the group continue rising to the occasion and maintaining a high level of enthusiasm for these and other events. Of course you want to avoid excess, but if you can inject a dose of fun and positive energy into a group activity, people will appreciate your contribution.

Keep your energy up and support your colleagues with an upbeat attitude.

## The Spice of Life

Variety is the hallmark of a well-run summer program, offering a rich mix of projects across numerous practice areas and departments. Think of it as a buffet, and you are trying to discern the dish that most appeals to you.

Sample the lot! You do this by signing onto different projects in different practice areas; the exposure should give you a healthy sense of both the firm and the practice of law.

## Training Up: Real World Lessons

In school, you learned theory; as a summer associate, you get your first taste of real legal practice. Think of your summer program as a clinical experience in which you get to apply all those academic principles in a practical setting.

Formal and informal training opportunities are plentiful in summer programs, and they teach real-world lessons. Take advantage of the many formal training programs, lectures and seminars. Equally valuable, but often overlooked by summer associates, is the institutional knowledge available from experienced attorneys. Include this element in your information mining and you should come out of the summer with a real sense of actual legal application.

## R-E-S-P-E-C-T

You have to give it to get it, so treat *everyone* with respect. This is very easy to do, and there is absolutely no downside to the practice.

The most highly regarded of summers appreciate everyone's contributions. Be humble, acknowledge everyone's contribution and remember that you are the new kid on the block. Everyone at the firm has experience and lessons to impart to a summer associate. Show that you recognize this fact by learning from everyone.

## In Conclusion

As in life, there are no guarantees at law firms, so don't assume that you automatically have a job.

Being selected as a summer associate reflects the firm's regard for your skills and personality, so you are well on your way. If you keep the tips above in mind as you go through the summer, you should be well served.

The summer program is set up to help you succeed. Minimize the distractions, and stay focused on the prize. •