

Around the Water Cooler

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Recent law school graduate increases job prospects through 'pipelining'

October 25, 2012



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As the director of the Office of Professionalism & Engagement, I meet regularly with students to get their input as to how The John Marshall Law School can improve our delivery of services. Most recently the top concern expressed in those student meetings, particularly by 3Ls, is the need for assistance in their job search. To that end, the Job Placement Initiative was created with very positive results. Let's check in with some of those recent graduates who found jobs with the help of the office.

A Conversation with Joe Kearney ('12) on Pipelining

Frossard: Joe, I know you were recently licensed after graduating from The John Marshall Law School and are currently a staff attorney for the Illinois Appellate Court. When did you begin your job search?

Kearney: It really wasn't until the end

of my 2L year that I knew the direction I wanted to take on the job front. Clerking for a judge was always of great interest, but I believed that I could wait until graduation to begin the search in earnest. It wasn't until I met with you about a year and a half before graduation that I realized my plan might need more than a minor restructuring.

Frossard: Explain what you mean by "restructuring."

Kearney: Perhaps a better word would be "structuring." I remember, after vaguely explaining to you that I'd like to perhaps explore clerking after graduation, you noted that I had not yet interned for any judges and stressed the need to "pipeline" in connection with working toward a clerkship on the Illinois Appellate Court. In other words, you told me to get an internship with an appellate court judge, which I was able to do during the summer of 2011, thanks to you.

Frossard: What did you learn from that internship?

Kearney: In addition to the great leap in substantive knowledge that I gained from Justice Bertina E. Lampkin that summer, I'd like to think that I also gained a great deal of relevant "soft" skills that are particularly useful to me at my current job. For instance, I learned how the appeals process actually works on a day-to-day level, how the clerk's office functions and where the offices of the various judges are located. Plus, there's the added benefit of running into judges and clerks in the elevators and around the court. Pretty soon, a discussion about the weather can morph into a Q&A session about a newly delivered point of law, and a new connection is formed.

Frossard: In terms of your present job as a staff attorney, what skills does that job require?

Kearney: Writing, writing, writing ... I'm expected to exercise a high level of care and deliver draft appellate orders, which are accurate, well-reasoned and concise.

Frossard: How did John Marshall prepare you for that job?

Kearney: I found John Marshall's

Lawyering Skills program to be top notch. I think that, thanks to the in-depth focus the school places on writing from the first semester, I was able to quickly gain a comfort level with legal writing skills. Of course, actually practicing law is a different ball game, and I literally learn more every hour of every day at my present job. However, it would be difficult for me to imagine better preparation at the law school-level than the broad-based yet tightly focused legal writing program that John Marshall offers.

Frossard: Any advice you can give recent graduates challenged by the current job market?

Kearney: Well, first of all, I truly feel fortunate every day that I have the option of going into work at the appellate court. It's a great place to be, and I don't take that lightly by any means. I can also appreciate the frustration of being an unemployed lawyer, having been one myself from February 2012 until May 2012, after taking the bar. With that said, I would urge anyone who is searching for work to remain positive, which I know is sometimes a tall task as rent and loans loom. My No. 1 piece of advice is to stay involved every day — be it with The Chicago or Illinois Bar Associations. These types of associations offer great networking and practice area events. Also, make sure you stay connected with your law school. Professors are always happy to offer projects to graduates, and it's a great way to feel like you're contributing and working within the law. Set up coffee and lunches with attorneys from all practice areas. Timing is everything and if you meet enough people, you'll learn of opportunities.

Kearney will be moderating a panel for students and alumni, titled "How to Get Hired," on Tuesday, November 13, at noon in Room 300 at The John Marshall Law School.

To view previous blogs by Frossard, go to professionalism.jmls.edu. Her next blog for Around the Water Cooler will be the second in a series of conversations with recent law school graduates, featuring a young lawyer who found that "timing really is everything" in a job search.