



Top 10 Secrets of Success from a Partner

by William C. O'Neil, Winston & Strawn LLP

This practice note outlines 10 practical tips you can use as a summer associate to help you form important relationships as you embark on perhaps the world's greatest summer job. Life as a BigLaw summer associate certainly has its perks—interesting assignments on high-profile matters, lunches at many of the city's finest restaurants, top-flight training programs, and interesting after-work events at some of the city's swankiest hot spots. If you view your summer associate experience only through this superficial lens, however, you may miss the greatest perk of all—the opportunity to build durable, meaningful, and lasting relationships with attorneys at your firm. I truly believe that the biggest predictor of success or failure in a large law firm is mentorship and sponsorship, which begins as a summer associate. Navigating the waters of your firm to ensure you get the best assignments on the most interesting transactions and cases takes wisdom and experience—those who have successfully chartered that path before you can be an invaluable resource. It is not that you cannot or will not figure it out on your own, but the journey can be far more direct with fewer missteps if you have the informal guidance of a good mentor. With that overarching thought serving as the back-bone of this article, the following tips will help you benefit from an insider's secrets for success as a BigLaw summer associate.



1. Collect real, genuine, authentic relationships.

If you measured your success this summer solely by the number and depth of the relationships you amassed, you would be wise beyond your years. When you return as a full time, first-year associate in 15 months, no one will remember the research you did or the memo you wrote, but they will remember the personal impact you made upon them.

2. Be infectiously likeable.

Success as a young lawyer is driven as much by your attitude as your aptitude (maybe even more so). Like everyone else, lawyers want to work with people that both have a can-do attitude and are fun to be around. Be positive, up-beat, curious, and excited for each opportunity you get this summer.

3. Never lose sight of the fact that this a client service business.

The market for high-end business lawyers is extremely competitive. The two most significant differentiating qualities any lawyer or law firm can have are (1) intellectual horsepower and (2) client service. Our clients tell us that intellectual horsepower is table stakes—it may get you an opportunity to pitch for business, but it does not win or earn repeat business. Client service is perhaps the single most important commodity we sell. That means we make our clients' problems our problems. We lie awake at night thinking about their issues so they don't

have to. Develop and nurture your commitment to client service as a summer associate. At the inception of your career, your "clients" are internal partners and associates. Treat them like gold.

4. Be vigilant about your internal reputation (i.e., your personal brand).

It takes years to build a reputation for excellence and positive working relationships in a large law firm, but that reputation can be lost in a matter of seconds. Establish quality control habits to ensure your work product is consistently excellent. For example, set internal deadlines for yourself to produce interim drafts of your work product to ensure you have sufficient time to review and revise your work before turning it in. You will be remembered and judged by the quality of your worst work product, not your best work product. Consistency matters. Put in the work to make a favorable first impression and then guard your reputation zealously.

5. Set goals (in writing).

Sit down and draft three to five goals for yourself this summer. I hope this article will give some good brainstorming ideas for those goals. Make sure they are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely).

6. Be proactive.

Think not only about the task you are working on, but other tasks and issues that stem from that assignment and how you can help to address them. Thinking beyond the literal bounds of the assignment is a great quality that will make partners and associates feel that you are invested in their deal/case and, ultimately, in the client's problems.

7. Become a great student of your firm.

Large law firms can be labyrinths with lawyers spread across the globe—knowing who to call for a particular specialty is a hugely valuable commodity. Take some time this summer to learn who does what in which office throughout your firm. Start building relationships across offices. This is invaluable political currency.



8. Disprove the millennial stereotypes.

Fair or unfair, the millennial generation has endured some bad public relations (e.g., entitled, me-first, and so on). This is particularly true in the eyes of some baby boomers (otherwise known as the senior partners in your firm). None of these stereotypes likely apply to you—after all, you worked your tail off to get into a great law school and then you finished at the top of your class. Nevertheless, you should be sensitive to the existence of these stereotypes in the subconscious of your older colleagues. You can and should disprove them each day with your actions.

9. Embrace face time.

Every firm, including the one you are spending your

summer with, has likely told you that “face time” isn’t a thing at that particular firm. Most of them are correct. Almost every firm in BigLaw has invested in the technological resources to enable you to work remotely on your own schedule from anywhere in the world. Treat this as a privilege, not a right. Work from wherever you’d like however you’d like, but do not squander those in-office, face-to-face opportunities to build relationships (see #1). After all, it is hard to build meaningful personal relationships via e-mail.

10. Take care of yourself.

Don’t skimp on sleep, exercise, or healthy eating. This is a fast-paced, high-stakes career path. Being at the top of your game physically will help you deliver peak job performance. Your career is a marathon, not a sprint. Pace yourself. Enjoy the scenery along the way. The journey is the destination.



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Bill O'Neil is an accomplished trial lawyer who concentrates his practice on a variety of business disputes, with a specific emphasis on post-closing M&A disputes. Bill also serves as the co-chair of Winston's Hiring Committee.

M&A Litigation

A significant portion of Bill's practice involves representing private equity funds and their portfolio companies. Bill frequently represents buyers and sellers in post-closing disputes, including working capital, representation and warranty, and fraud claims. Bill also represents buyers in claims against representation and warranty insurance carriers. More than a dozen private equity funds have retained Bill to handle these disputes; often where another law firm handled the underlying transaction.

Complex Commercial Litigation

Bill also represents numerous public company clients in corporate governance litigation, shareholder strike suits, internal investigations, and other complex business litigation. He has represented dozens of Fortune 500 companies in disputes ranging from routine to high-stakes, "bet the company" litigation. Mr. O'Neil is also frequently called upon to provide risk management and litigation avoidance advice to his clients.

Antitrust Litigation

Bill has significant antitrust experience. He was defense counsel in *In re Automotive Parts Litigation*, *In re Linerboard Antitrust Litigation*, and *In re Sulfuric Acid Litigation*, and successfully prosecuted price-fixing claims on behalf of Solyndra LLC against three of China's largest solar panel manufacturers.

Pro Bono

Bill's pro bono cases have included representing a prison inmate in a successful appeal before the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals that resulted in new law in the circuit, the court's reversal of its own prior precedent, and the reversal of the defendant's conviction.

