

Building a Career in International Arbitration and Dispute Resolution in the Times of COVID-19

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International arbitration and dispute resolution is a unique and rewarding practice area. However, those just beginning their careers in the era of COVID-19 will have to overcome a number of new challenges. On May 19, Winston and the [CIArb North America](#) Branch Young Members Group co-hosted a webinar to further explore this topic.

The conversation was moderated by Harout J. Samra, Associate at DLA Piper. Additional participants included Amanda Lee, Solicitor/Consultant at Seymours and Founder of Careers in Arbitration; Louis Ramos, Managing Director at Major, Lindsey & Africa; and Joan Stearns Johnsen, Senior Legal Skills Professor at the University of Florida and Chair of the ABA's Section of Dispute Resolution.

The program was geared towards graduating law students and young lawyers who are in the early planning stages of their international arbitration and dispute resolution practices. The overarching theme was how to effectively position yourself despite the current health and economic challenges.

Factoring in COVID: Do's and Don'ts for Law Students & Young Lawyers

DO's

1. Be flexible

For summer associates, Susan acknowledges that many, if not most, summer associate programs at various law firms will be conducted remotely. She encourages law students to shift their expectations to the present reality and focus on being adaptable to these unprecedented circumstances. Students and young practitioners must not fixate on the experiences they are missing out on, but should rather focus on new opportunities that have become available. For instance, with no time wasted on a commute to work, summer associates and young lawyers can take advantage of more one-on-one time with more senior practitioners, meaning more time for guidance and meaningful feedback.

All the panelists agree that getting accustomed to virtual meetings, and even virtual interviews, is critical. Though this has the potential to be slightly uncomfortable at first, it is quickly becoming the norm. Accordingly, be mindful of your space, pay attention to lighting, conduct a test run of your technology, and remember that while formal attire is less preferred these days, it is nevertheless important to appear professional.

2. Take advantage of opportunities

Though the future appears uncertain, Amanda urges students and young lawyers to channel any fear they may be experiencing into more productive avenues. For instance, Amanda's number one advice is to *publish, publish, publish*. Despite the current circumstances, technology permits students and young lawyers to conduct in-depth research and share ideas from within their own homes. Amanda points out the various online research blogs focused on international arbitration and dispute resolution that may be willing to publish these pieces. Writing articles is also a way for students and young lawyers to gain deeper knowledge about a number of international topics. Furthermore, Amanda's emphasis on producing written content is not without practical considerations for law students: many employers expect a writing sample from a prospective applicant's time during a summer legal internship.

3. Find ways to demonstrate your commitment

Joan's advice for students and young lawyers is to be the person others want to work with, while also acknowledging that this may sound easier than it really is. Developing good interpersonal skills and learning how to refine work product is not to be taken for granted. There is no better way for students and young lawyers to demonstrate their commitment to the profession, and particularly the fields of international arbitration and dispute resolution, than by developing valuable skillsets that could be useful to others in the field. Even the simple knowledge of technology could make a young practitioner very valuable on a team with less technologically-savvy attorneys.

Louis further notes that law firms are looking to hire individuals who demonstrate a ready commitment to the job. Louis reminds prospective applicants that employers are willing to extend employment offers to applicants who consistently demonstrate a willingness to move the ball forward on cases and provide thoughtful work product. And even for those who have already secured employment, demonstrating that you are not only a team player, but that you are also willing to go above and beyond means a greater likelihood of securing a steady stream of assignments.

DON'Ts

1. Don't fixate on what you're missing out on

The panelists unanimously agree that it is critical to not view the current circumstances in terms of lost opportunities or experiences. The current shelters-in-place and extended remote work situations no doubt put a temporary halt to various work social events, legal conferences, work travel, etc. However, this does not mean that such opportunities are completely forgone. Rather, legal organizations, including law firms, are adapting to the circumstances and formulating creative ways for students and young practitioners to network with others in the firm and to remain engaged. Not to mention the number of video conferences being organized worldwide with practitioners in the international arbitration and dispute resolution fields, providing students and young lawyers with the opportunity to engage with international practitioners and gain insight into these practice areas.

2. Don't view your career with only a short-term lens

Amanda and Susan caution against falling asleep at the wheel. Despite the difficulties some may face in finding a job or in advancing their careers while COVID-19 impedes certain professional opportunities, both agree that every student or young lawyer should view their legal career with a long-term perspective. This means that it is critical that students and young lawyers attempt to gain the most experience that they can during this time, even if that means having to seek different opportunities than the ones they had planned for previously. For instance, where obtaining a summer associate position at a large law firm is no longer possible, students can seek internships with smaller, local firms or non-profit organizations, or pursue legal externships in government.

3. Refrain from having a controversial online footprint

It is important to think carefully about the type of content a prospective job applicant, or even an employed young lawyer, makes available online. Amanda advises students and young lawyers to shy away from posting controversial content on the internet, particularly at this early stage in their careers. For instance, employers may factor into their hiring decision a student's controversial opinion on an international arbitration topic, which may directly pertain to an employer's existing or prospective client matters. Additionally, for those who do decide to take Amanda's advice and write research articles, any content that is to be published online and posted for others to read should be well thought out and well written.

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