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SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN ■ TIPS & TACTICS FOR NEW LAWYERS

Start Out on the Right Foot: Get Focused and Get Going!

During their first years in practice, new lawyers have many questions about what they are doing and how, or even whether, to stay the course. There is no predefined, predetermined road to success. Whether you're in a large firm with a clearly articulated path to partnership or a small firm that continually fluxes with market conditions, you can have a much greater influence over your professional life than you may think.

Much of the learning we do before entering the job market is passive—we are taught a lot of facts and principles, but few hands-on steps for professional achievement. You will, though, enjoy greater success and satisfaction if you are proactive in your career development from the outset. Here are pointers for actively starting on the right foot.

Develop a personal plan. Don't wait for the firm to tell you how to increase your chances of success. Devise your own annual development plan. A written plan will help you focus your energies; monitor your progress against your goals; and, ultimately, enable you to have more control over your work, your practice specialty and your advancement in the firm, the profession and the external community.

Understand what the firm expects. Your firm's annual associate review process may leave you with a less than clear view of how you're progressing in relation to

the firm's norms and expectations. Be proactive about obtaining regular, specific feedback on your strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. In addition, monitor the firm's needs relative to your practice expertise: You need to make sure your skills are in demand and are perceived to be of value to partners and clients.

Find the work style that works for you. Observe others in the firm and identify qualities and approaches shared by individuals who have become successful. Think about ways to meld your style, preferences and strengths with those of other lawyers, staff and clients.

Keep Your Eyes on the Road

Start early—align your personal and professional goals and do your best to understand how what you're doing now will help you achieve your longer-term goals. Whether you aim to make partner in your current firm or to do something very different, if you are careful about planning, taking initiative and monitoring your progress, you are much more apt to achieve your goals and realize success. So get focused and take action *now*. ■



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Checklist

How to Execute Your Professional Success Plan

- Write down your long-term goals. Where do you want to be in 5 years? In 10 years?
- Write down your 12-month goals. Possibilities include enhancing your substantive expertise, client service, position in the firm, professional development skills, marketing and reputation building.
- Put each 12-month goal in the left-hand column of a three-column table. Next to each goal, in the second column, list several skills, strategies and action steps required to meet each goal. In the third column, indicate deadlines for completing each activity.
- Review your goals and strategies with a mentor or supervisor to make sure your goals and priorities are reasonable.
- Add the action items to your to-do list in Outlook or other calendar manager.
- Take one small step every day to advance some aspect of your success plan.
- Review your plan at the end of each year and discuss your progress with a mentor or supervisor. Remember to consider the feedback from your annual performance review.
- Revise your goals and action steps and start your new year!