

Now, You're A Lawyer

Litigation Invitation By Joan Haratani



SAN FRANCISCO - Dear New Lawyer. Welcome to the profession.

You have picked a career that is both challenging and rewarding.

I understand that you may be contemplating going into litigation. I hope these brief words of advice will assist you in determining whether this path is the one for you.

First, you need to assess your personality type.

Do you enjoy being on the front line? Do you feel that you have or can develop front-room skills so that you can sway a judge or jury to your client's point of view? Can you be flexible with your time?

Some days or weeks, you may be burning the midnight oil at your office. Other days, you may have a little more free time than you are comfortable with.

Does a work schedule of 75 percent intensity followed by 25 percent of "normalcy" sound like something you can handle?

I think that those of you who choose to litigate should enter this career with your eyes wide open.

Litigation can be fun, fascinating and satisfying. It also can mean long hours, a lot of travel and not enough sleep for short periods of time.

Why litigation? Because you will enter into a career of learning different topics very well. You will meet professionals at the top of their game, and you will push yourself into becoming the lawyer and person you can and should be.

In other words, the path of litigation also leads to the path of self-knowledge and self-confidence. And this is a good thing.

To develop yourself, you need to be a careful observer and an astute listener. Identify the attorneys in your workplace or community who are the legal eagles, the superstars. Approach them to see whether you can work with them.

Be proactive. Watch them in action, whether it be on a conference call, in a deposition or hearing or, even better, at trial.

Go to court during law-and-motion proceedings or trials, and watch the judge and lawyers. Note what you think is effective and ineffective. Remember, being true to your own style is more powerful than copying someone else's. When you get an assignment, always understand the point of it all, meaning where your assignment fits into the big picture. And be sure to turn in your assignment in on time.

Make sure everything you do reflects your best effort. We are not perfect, but striving for perfection means you will at least hit a high accuracy rate.

Remember also your humanity. Treat people - yes, even adversaries - with respect and kindness.

Remember that the profession, while a noble and worthy one, does not and should not define your life entirely.

Make sure you spend time taking care of yourself, your family and your relationships.

At the end of the day, a satisfying career is wonderful to attain and a laudable goal—but even more so when you are surrounded by people you love and who love you.

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