

TIPS FOR THE NEW LAWYER

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25 Tips for the New Lawyer

This is not going to be easy. But you knew that well before you passed the bar (Congratulations, by the way!). There are a lot of lessons you will need to learn the hard way. Still. It would be nice, wouldn't it, to have a slight edge when starting out as a new lawyer? Perhaps an older, savvier friend to fill you in on subtler codes of conduct or to introduce you to the court clerk. Someone to grab you by the elbow and steer you away from trouble and toward better decisions. Or even a cranky old guy to "teach you a thing or two."

We think so, too. So consider this list of tips and truths your friendly kick to the shins under the conference table and, in some cases, a not-so-subtle kick in the pants. We compiled "25 Tips for the New Lawyer" to help you get out of the blocks with the best start possible. Whether you're backed up by an army of support staff and senior partners or braving it solo, soak up some of this sound advice and see if it doesn't help the hard lessons come a little easier.

(Psssst. You'll find more than just 25 great tips here—there are also 50+ links to some of Attorney at Work's most popular posts.)

—Merrilyn Astin Tarlton



There are people around you who know more than you do. Let them help you. Contrary to your every instinct, you do not have to know the answer to everything. Besides, nobody likes a smarty pants.

Related Links:

[Curmudgeon's Perspective: Decisions, Decisions](#)

[Startup Advice from Women Lawyers](#)

[The Importance of Being Trained](#)



As a general rule, the ability an individual has to screw everything up for you is in direct inverse relationship to their pay grade.
So keep your staff happy.

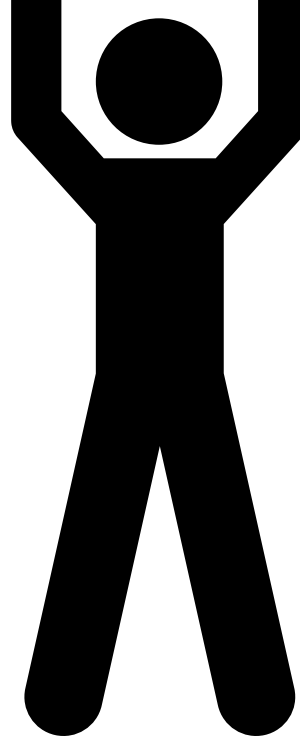
Related Links:

[*The Elephant in the Office*](#)

[*What Can a Marketing Assistant Do for You?*](#)

[*Stupid Mistakes Lawyers Make with Their Computers*](#)





**Your client is always right.
(Most of the time, that is.)**



Related Links:

[Calming Down an Angry Client](#)

[Fire a Client](#)



The answer should never be “No, you can’t!”
Try “Yes, let’s figure out how you can.”



Related Links:

[The Art of We](#)



Return phone calls promptly. Really.

Related Links:

Be the World's Most Client Accessible Lawyer

Fear of Phoning





You are going to have to pay your dues. It may seem the work is beneath you. You may not enjoy it. Others may take credit for it. But to get to the really juicy stuff, you're going to have to carry someone else's brief bag.

Related Links:

[*Managing Up*](#)

[*You're Hired! Here's How to Stay That Way*](#)





Try, in everything you do, to teach as well as tell.

Related Links:

Four Things Your Assistant Can Do Better

A Cynic's Guide to Pro Bono Work

Wiser Words





**Before beginning the work, ask your client
or supervisor what success will look like.
Don't just guess. You'll probably be wrong.**

Related Links:

[*Ask Yourself the Moneyball Question*](#)

[*When You Lose a Client*](#)



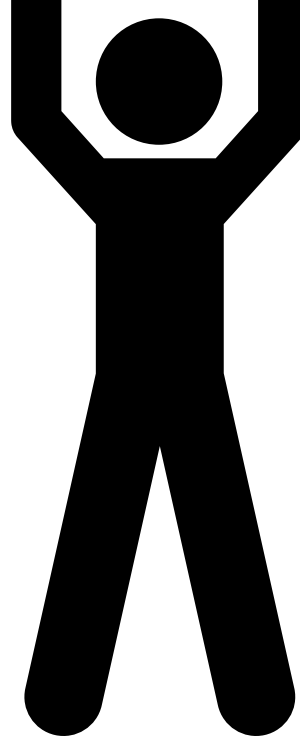


**You are responsible for getting all the facts.
Even if people don't want to give them to you.**

Related Links:

[10 Ways to Avoid a Malpractice Claim](#)





**While your client or colleague is in your law office,
you are the host. Act like one.**



Related Links:

[Big Ideas for Small Talk](#)

[How to Behave at An Event](#)



**Under-promise and over-deliver.
Never the other way around.**

Related Links:

[Surprise Your Client](#)
[Essential Cloud Apps for Lawyer](#)



**Always be just a little bit early for an appointment.
If you must be late, call ahead to warn them. It
shows that you think they are important. Everyone
likes to feel important.**

Related Links:

[Curmudgeon's Perspective: Late ... Again?](#)





It's much easier to look at the big picture first and figure out the little pieces than it is to fiddle with the little pieces and then try to make a decent big picture out of them.

Related Links:

[*Now for Something Completely Different*](#)
[*Organize Your Brain with Mindmapping*](#)



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There's a difference between "telling" someone something and "communicating" it. In the first case, it left your lips. In the second, it left your lips, entered their mind and was understood. You are responsible for the entire cycle.

Related Links:

Don't Negotiate, Collaborate!

Curmudgeon's Perspective: What Did You Call Me?



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While people around you may be worried about their hourly rate in relationship to other lawyers in your firm, your clients is worried about it in relationship to the value the work has to them. Try to think like your client. Always.

Related Links:

[*The Best Pricing Advice Ever*](#)

[*First Figure Out Your Fee*](#)

[*Getting the Fee You Deserve*](#)



**Maintain your instrument.
It is at least as important to rest and renew as it
is to work hard and do “important stuff.” In fact,
if you neglect vacations you will soon lose the
capacity to do the important stuff.**

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Related Links:

Knockout Burnout

Take Charge of Your Destiny

Choose One Thing

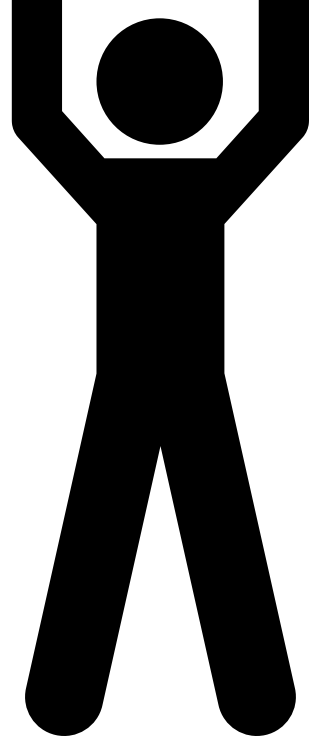
Supercharge Your Brain by Going Offline



Sometimes the best answer is the one someone else thought of. Acknowledge that and give them credit. The long-term payoff will far surpass the momentary glory of feeling you were the smartest. Bright people will come back to work with you again.

Related Links:

[*Take It From the Wonder Pets*](#)
[*The Cost of Switching Law Firms*](#)



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Your supervisor, mentor or senior partner isn't your mother or your professor. She or he won't take responsibility for your personal or professional development. That's your job.

Related Links:

[*Can I Get a Little Help Here?*](#)

[*Stop, Look and Listen*](#)



When you complete a matter or a task, ask for feedback. Be clear that you're not looking for flattery—you want to know how to improve next time.

Related Links:

[*Afraid to Talk? Overcoming Social Anxiety*](#)





It's time to clean up your act online.
Potential clients know how to use Google just like you. So do employers, colleagues, reporters and everyone else. Make sure you look (mostly) professional or you'll be your own worst enemy.

Related Links:

[*Business Development Marching Orders*](#)

[*Buff Up Your Bio*](#)

[*Shape Up Your Social Status Daily*](#)

[*Today's To-Do: Promote Self*](#)





Offer to help.

Related Links:

[Take Five Steps Up to Leadership](#)

[Take a Risk: Trust](#)

[Being Kind](#)

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Other people are busy, too. Value and guard their time as well as your own.

Related Links:

Ditch the “I Didn’t Get It Done Today” Blues

Stamp Out Snoozing

Back Off That Send Button, Buddy





**Take notes. It helps you remember, and it shows people that you believe what they are saying is important enough to write down.
(Look them in the eye once in a while, too.)**

Related Links:

Say What?

Make Meetings Count

Conference Call Etiquette

Using the iPad in Meetings



Say please and thank you.

Related Links:

[Curmudgeon's Perspective: Civil Matters](#)

[Say Thank You to Stand Out](#)

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Remember that clients don't always want a lawyer. Sometimes they just need someone to listen to them.

Sign up for [Attorney at Work](#) and get good ideas like these delivered directly to your computer, tablet or smartphone each morning.

About Attorney at Work

Attorney at Work is for the enterprising lawyer. Thought leaders, innovators and real-world practitioners—the best in the business from around the globe, actually—serve up original ideas that will scratch the itch, smooth the rough edges, kick out the jams and point the shining way for you to create the life and career you just flat deserve.

Visit our website at www.attorneyatwork.com (ALERT: You'll find a lot of really useful and entertaining stuff in that daily stream!) and then simply type your email address into the **Subscribe** box to receive a free dispatch every workday morning.

Merrilyn Astin Tarlton has been helping lawyers and law firms think differently about the business of practicing law since 1984. She was a founding member of the Legal Marketing Association, past Trustee and President of the College of Law Practice Management and recipient of the LMA Hall of Fame award. Merrilyn is Partner/Catalyst of Attorney at Work along with Joan Feldman, Partner/Editorial and Mark Feldman, Partner/Creative.

