

# 5 Tips to Use on the Lawyer's Road to Success

October 27, 2016

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The practice of law provides incredible opportunities not only to advance your career but excel as a person. The process begins once you pass the bar and continues throughout your career. As the late Arnold Palmer taught us, "The road to success is always under construction."

Here are five tips to help get you there.

**1. Learn the law:** Once you know the law you can practice with confidence. Clients will notice as well as your adversaries and judges. Become board-certified in a specialty area of practice. Florida has 25 areas of specialization and obtaining board certification is an impartial recognition that you have what it takes. Studying for the exam alone will expose you to areas of your practice where you previously had no knowledge or experience and will make you a better lawyer. Passing the exam provides you with the opportunity to hold yourself out as a specialist.

**2. Get out from behind your desk:** Opportunities exist for lawyers at all levels. The Florida Bar and the American Bar Association provide options to write, publish and work alongside other practitioners. Some become friends and others can serve as great mentors to guide you along in your career. But once you become involved, participate! There is nothing that will pay more dividends than dedicating your time to a cause. When you speak or write, you force yourself to learn and become better at what you do. Writing an article on a particular subject matter that can be handed to a potential client is a powerful tool to distinguish yourself from others. Martindale Hubbell and Chambers USA have criteria to be considered based upon involvement with the legal community for purposes rating lawyers in their publications. Through bar service you can become more familiar with technology trends, ethics and professionalism. Volunteer for a Florida or local bar grievance and/or professionalism committee. Through that experience, you will learn the traps of practicing law and learn from other committee members on how to stay out of trouble. How do you get on a committee? Call the current chair and let him/her

know you are interested. Donate your legal services to charitable and community organizations such as veterans, the disabled or other groups that need your help. Volunteer work also provides opportunities to interact with community leaders that also serve on charitable boards. They often appreciate your efforts and will keep you in mind when someone they know needs a lawyer.

**3. Make connections:** Bar organizations offer opportunities to get to know leading lawyers throughout the country as you organize national panels. I personally met civil rights attorney Fred Gray, an 85-year-old lawyer, at an ABA event 15 years ago. Gray represented the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, and was featured in the movie "Selma." Based on that connection I brought him to a national construction conference in Florida to speak on the civil rights movement. But for my bar service I never would have met or known about him. For those that practice alone or in a small firm, knowing other lawyers outside your jurisdiction that practice in your area provides access to a boutique group of specialists that you can call seeking guidance to solve problems. When there is no one down the hall to consult, pick up the telephone, send an email and be the beneficiary of great advice. Other lawyers will often be happy to share form agreements to assist you. Even in a large firm where you may be hesitant to ask the partner a "stupid" question, consulting with your peers outside of your firm can be a tremendous benefit.

**4. Get referrals:** Through bar service I have met and gotten to know lawyers throughout the country. When they need a lawyer in Florida they call, and when I need a lawyer in their jurisdiction I reach out to them. Clients appreciate having a lawyer who can provide a referral to a knowledgeable lawyer who can take care of their problem outside their jurisdiction. But it is more than just lawyer stuff. If a family member or friend needs medical attention outside Florida or someone gets arrested, knowing professionals in other places can be of tremendous value in terms of prompt obtaining guidance and assistance.

**5. Improve administrative skills:** Voluntary bar associations run efficiently, and leaders who chair committees often have tremendous experience. Much can be learned by serving on a committee that is well-organized. These leaders know how to prepare an agenda, delegate to others and execute a plan to get things done. By serving under these leaders, not only do you become a better lawyer but a better administrator and problem solver. In addition, these leaders provide you an opportunity to forge relationships with them and receive solid advice regarding your practice, your career or your personal life.

As lawyers, we should strive to be the best we can be. Recognize that there is always room for improvement and that our road is always "under construction."

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