

Competencies of Successful Lawyers: How Pre-Law Students Can Prepare Themselves for Future Success

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Sources of Data

- ▶ Professor Neil Hamilton, the Director of the Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership in the Professions, has conducted surveys of a variety of legal employers in Minnesota in the last 18 months asking them about competencies important in their decision to hire a new lawyer.
- ▶ 14 of the largest law firms were invited to complete the survey and all did so
- ▶ 87 small firms (2-9 lawyers) from the metro area and from out-state Minnesota were invited to complete the survey and 23 did so
- ▶ 37 county attorneys from the metro area and from out-state Minnesota were invited to complete the survey and 18 did so
- ▶ 6 regional legal aid offices were invited to complete the survey and all did so

Nature of the Survey

- ▶ The survey asked about the relative importance of roughly two dozen factors in deciding whether to hire a new lawyer.
- ▶ Factors were assessed on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being critically important, 4 being very important, 3 being important, 2 being somewhat important, and 1 being slightly important.
- ▶ The results are reported in an article: Neil W. Hamilton, *Changing Markets Create Opportunities: Emphasizing the Competencies Legal Employers Use in Hiring New Lawyers (Including Professional Formation/Professionalism)*, 65 S. CAR. L. REV. 547 (2014).

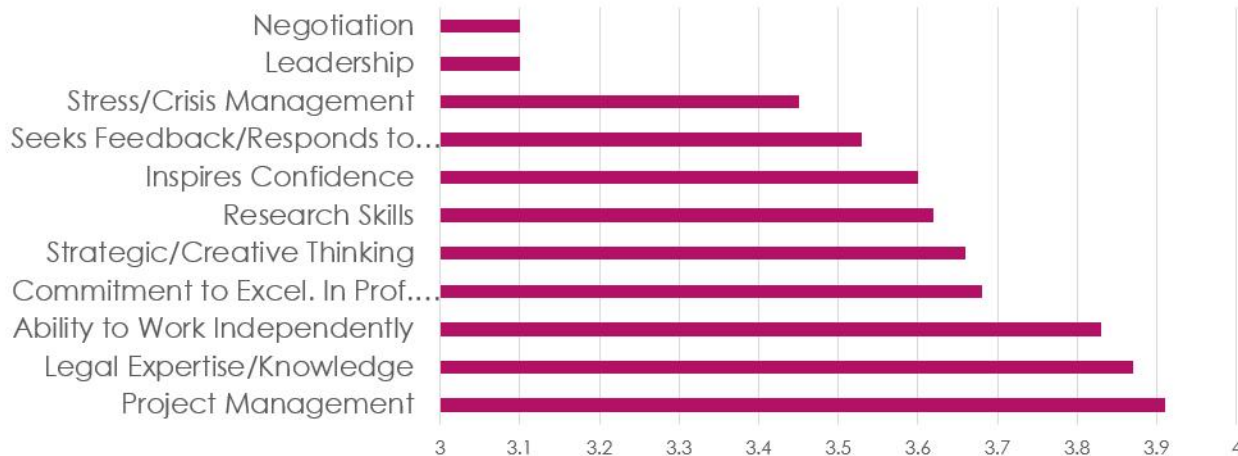
Competencies Considered Critically Important to Very Important

**Very Important to Critically Important Competencies
(Average Score of 4.00 or Higher Across Employers)**



Competencies Considered Very Important to Important

Competencies Considered Very Important to Important
(Average Score of 3.00 to 3.99 Across Employers)



Other Studies Show Similar Results

- ▶ Shultz-Zedeck Study – Marjorie M. Shultz & Sheldon Zedeck, *Predicting Lawyer Effectiveness: Broadening the Basis for Law School Admissions Decisions*, 36 LAW & SOC. INQUIRY 620 (2011).
- ▶ National Conference of Bar Examiners New Lawyers Survey – Steven S. Nettles & James Hellrung, *A STUDY OF THE NEWLY LICENSED LAWYER* (2012)
- ▶ Canadian Survey – Federation of Law Societies of Canada, NATIONAL ADMISSIONS STANDARDS PROJECT: NATIONAL ENTRY TO PRACTICE COMPETENCY PROFILE VALIDATION REPORT (Sept. 2012)
- ▶ Focus Groups on Hiring Criteria – Susan C. Wawrose, *WHAT DO LEGAL EMPLOYERS WANT TO SEE IN NEW GRADUATES?: USING FOCUS GROUPS TO FIND OUT*, 39 OHIO N. U. L. REV. 505 (2013)

Important Competencies Developed in Law School

- ▶ Note that of these 19 competencies in the “Important” to “Very Important” category and the “Very Important” to “Critically Important” category, only a minority receive meaningful emphasis in law schools.
- ▶ In the “very important” to “critically important” category – legal education focuses significantly on **analytical skills** and **written/oral communication skills**
- ▶ In the “important” to “very important” category – legal education focuses significantly on **research skills** and **legal expertise/knowledge**
- ▶ If one were generous in thinking about the scope of legal education, one might suggest that legal education also helps students to some extent on **good judgment/common sense/problem solving** and on **initiative/ambition/drive/work ethic**, in the “very important” to “critically important” category and on **ability to work independently** and on **negotiation** in the “important” to “very important” category.

Important Competencies on Which Law School Does Not Place Great Emphasis

- ▶ The other 11 competencies that were ranked in the “Important” to “Very Important” category or in the “Very Important” to “Critically Important” category largely receive little emphasis in law school.
- ▶ In the “Very Important” to “Critically Important” category – the following competencies generally receive little emphasis in most law schools:
 - ▶ Integrity/Honesty/Trustworthiness
 - ▶ Dedication to Client Service
 - ▶ Commitment to Organization
 - ▶ Maintains Relationships/Teamwork

Important Competencies on Which Law School Does Not Place Great Emphasis

- ▶ In the “Important” to “Very Important” category – the following competencies generally receive little emphasis in most law schools:
 - ▶ Project Management
 - ▶ Commitment to Excellence In Professional Development
 - ▶ Strategic/Creative Thinking
 - ▶ Inspires Confidence
 - ▶ Seeks Feedback/Responds to Feedback
 - ▶ Stress/Crisis Management
 - ▶ Leadership

Why Should Pre-Law Students and Pre-Law Advisors Care About These Competencies?

- ▶ **Employment Outcomes Should Matter to Students**
- ▶ Pre-law students should want to be as well-positioned as possible to be successful in their employment search upon graduation from law school.
- ▶ While being successful in law school is an important part of finding success in one’s employment search, this competency data suggests there are a number of competencies that one can and should develop before and during law school that can provide differentiation in the marketplace for employment.

Why Should Pre-Law Students and Pre-Law Advisors Care About These Competencies?

- ▶ **Institutional Emphasis on Employment Outcomes Increasingly Will Impact Admissions Decisions**
- ▶ Shultz and Zedeck noted that there are a number of assessment tools with better correlations to their effectiveness factors than the LSAT
- ▶ But at the moment, the LSAT remains the primary assessment tool for admission to law school.
- ▶ Nonetheless, with the increased transparency relating to employment outcomes, law schools increasingly are paying attention to assuring positive employment outcomes.
- ▶ This means that with more and more frequency, admissions committees will look for some of these competencies as indicators of employability at graduation.

How Can Students Develop Some of These Competencies?

▶ **Integrity/Honesty/Trustworthiness**

- ▶ Has the student had an experience in which his or her integrity was challenged or where he or she has been given a great deal of trust and has manifested that he or she is worthy of the trust?
- ▶ Can the student speak to this in the personal statement or can a recommender speak to this in a letter of recommendation?

How Can Students Develop Some of These Competencies?

▶ Dedication to client service or commitment to an organization

- ▶ Does the student have work experience in a customer facing role and can the student tell a story about going “above and beyond” the call of duty in providing customer service?
- ▶ If not, can the student demonstrate a commitment to an organization, or a project, in which the student showed a willingness to sacrifice self-interest in the service of the organization or the project?
- ▶ Can someone writing a letter of recommendation describe personal experience with the student showing this commitment to service?

How Can Students Develop Some of These Competencies?

▶ Maintains Relationships/Teamwork

- ▶ As a service profession, the practice of law is about building and sustaining relationships.
- ▶ With increasing complexity, the practice of law also is about teamwork as people across disciplines and organizations work together to serve clients.
- ▶ Does the student have the ability to speak to working productively in a team/group setting?
- ▶ Does the student have the ability to develop and maintain relationships with mentors?

How Can Students Develop Some of These Competencies?

► Leadership

- To what extent can the student demonstrate recognized leadership as a captain on an athletic team or as an officer in an organization?
- Can the student speak to not just to a “position” of leadership, but actual leadership behavior?
- If not, can the student develop an opportunity to demonstrate real leadership?
- Can a recommender speak to an example where the student demonstrated leadership?

How Can Students Develop Some of These Competencies?

► Project Management

- To what extent can the student demonstrate the ability to conceive and execute the various steps associated with managing a “project”?
- Can the student do so with respect to a project involving a group of people?
- Can a recommender describe the student's management of a project and leadership of a group executing a project?

The Formation Challenge of Professional Education

- ▶ The challenge is the same across all professional education:
- ▶ “The chief formative challenge” is to help each student change from thinking like a student where he or she learns and applies routine techniques to solve well-structured problems toward the **acceptance and internalization of responsibility for others, particularly the person served, and for the student’s own development toward excellence** as a practitioner at all the competencies of the profession.

Bill Sullivan, TEACHING MEDICAL PROFESSIONALISM (2009)

Competencies and Other Directedness

- ▶ One of the key lessons here is that students need to make the transition from being students to being lawyers.
- ▶ It is not good enough to be a good student – that will not distinguish one in the market and will not necessarily be the determinant of nor the measure of success as a lawyer.
- ▶ One needs to develop these other competencies that are the measure of whether someone has a “fiduciary disposition” -- is good at serving others and being responsible to/for others as a lawyer.