**CAREER GOALS AND CAREER PLANNING**

**A Self-Assessment Checklist for Graduating Law Students**

The following self-assessment checklist is designed to get you to think about some of the factors you’ll have to weigh when deciding what types of jobs to seek as a new grad. Use it as a guide to determine your preferences, skills, aptitudes, needs, goals, and other considerations that matter to you. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions—the questions are simply designed to help you begin thinking about what’s important to you in your first position.

**Section 1: Your Skills and Aptitudes**

What were some of the law school courses in which you did well?

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What practical, clinical, on-the-job or internship experience do you have to offer a legal employer?

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What life experiences do you have that may help you perform well on the job as a new attorney?

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What are some compliments about your performance that you’ve received from employers, supervisors, colleagues or professors?

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What are some critiques or criticisms about your performance that you’ve received from employers, supervisors, colleagues or professors?

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What are some of your most marketable skills—in other words, what skills do you have to offer a potential employer?

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What parts of your legal education have proven to be the most challenging for you?

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What parts of your legal education have proven to be the most rewarding?

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What makes you stand out from other job applicants?

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In what ways do you work well with others, and what are some past examples where you successfully collaborated with others?

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What do you consider your greatest success(es) in your legal education or experience?

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What do you have to offer to a potential employer?

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**Section 2: Your Interests**

On the job or in school, what are some of the tasks that you look forward to doing?

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What are some of the tasks that you dread?

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If you have legal experience, what substantive areas or subjects do you most enjoy?

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What substantive legal courses did you most enjoy in law school?

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What areas of the law do you see yourself practicing in?

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What areas of the law would you not consider practicing in?

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Go back to basics: what made you go to law school and choose the legal profession?

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What are some of your interests outside of the law?

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**Section 3: Your Future Goals**

Where would you like your career to be in:

1 year:

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5 years:

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10 years:

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What are some things you’d like to accomplish in your career?

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You’re reading your “career obituary.” What does it say?

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What are some personal goals you’d like to accomplish?

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**Section 4: Your Current Needs and Practical Considerations**

After looking at your monthly budget, what is the minimum salary that you’ll need to support yourself?

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What is your ideal salary?

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Besides your salary, what other benefits do you need or desire?

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Do you have any scheduling or timing issues that would limit you to working only a certain set schedule?

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To what extent does the location of your employer matter to you—do you need or want to live in a certain place, or are you comfortable with relocating?

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What other practical factors do you need to consider before taking a job?

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**Section 5: Your Potential Employers**

In what type of work environment do you work best—for example, do you thrive at a large employer or school where many others work, or do you prefer a smaller workplace where you have few coworkers?

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Are you interested in practicing law—and if so, would you prefer to practice in a private setting, government or nonprofit employment?

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Are you interested in an alternative legal career or a non-legal position?

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To what extent are the following factors important to you (rate them on a scale of 1 through 10, with 1 being not at all important and 10 being extremely important):

Employer diversity: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Associate retention: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Associate training and professional development: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Meaningful work assignments: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Being challenged on the job: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Finding a mentor: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Work-life balance: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Pay: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Contributing to the greater good on the job: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What does the “right fit” mean to you?

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Now that you’ve spent considerable time assessing your strengths, weaknesses, needs and goals, take some time to mull over the data you’ve just assembled. What do your answers indicate? What does your test tell you about the potential sources of employment that may be right for you? Ask yourself the following questions:

* Work environments: Do my answers indicate a clear preference for any particular work environment, such as large firms, small firms, government employment, or public interest work?
* Practice areas: Do my answers indicate a clear preference for any particular practice area(s)?
* Other careers: Do my answers indicate a clear preference for any alternative legal careers or even non-legal careers?
* Jobs to steer clear from: Do my answers indicate any particular types of jobs to stay away from?
* Jobs for which I may be a good fit: Do my answers indicate any marketable skills that would transfer well into a particular position?
* Jobs for which I may not be a good fit: Do my answers indicate any personal or professional weaknesses that may cause me not to perform well at a particular job?

Excerpted from *Your First Year as a Laywer* by Ursula Furi-Perry (Jist Publishing, 2010).

**Factors to Consider When Deciding on a Career Path**

Career materials and books for lawyers often urge readers to focus on and try to find “the right fit.” But just what does “the right fit” mean, and what goes into finding it on the job? The following are some factors to help you get started, along with some questions to ponder when contemplating each factor.

* Your interests. For example:
	+ Do you want to perfect your skills in one specialty or practice area, or would you rather work in various practice areas and avoid being pigeon-holed?
	+ Do you want to feel that you are helping your community or the greater good in your work?
	+ Do you enjoy working with many clients, or would you rather enjoy building relationships with fewer clients whom you serve more closely?
	+ Do you want to practice law; to practice law in non-traditional ways; or to leave the practice of law?
	+ Do you want to be given substantive and meaningful work assignments?
* Your on-the-job needs and preferences. Maybe you want to work with a diverse group of people; maybe you want in-depth training and plenty of opportunities for professional development; maybe you’re seeking a close-knit work environment. For example, ask the following questions:
	+ Do you want to work in an environment that makes you feel comfortable every day, or would you rather work in an environment that frequently gets you out of your comfort zone?
	+ Do you want to work for an employer whose values match yours closely, or at a place where many different viewpoints and values are represented?
	+ Do you want to work with people who are a lot like you, or with a diverse group at an employer that values cultural sensitivity and diversity in the workplace?
	+ Do you want plenty of opportunities for professional development and continuing education?
	+ Do you want clear opportunities for advancement, along with requirements for advancement that are clearly spelled out?
	+ Do you want to work for an employer that provides networking opportunities or many opportunities for socializing with colleagues outside of work?
* Your future goals. For example:
	+ Do you want a position that you hope to hold just for the next few years, or a long-term position?
	+ Do you want to build a skill set that will readily translate into a variety of career options in the future?
	+ Do you want to work for an employer that’s amenable to organizational change and growth?
	+ Do you want to participate in important decisions that happen in the workplace?
* Your own skills and aptitudes; the potential employer’s preferences; and the likelihood of you being hired for the position. You may have your heart set on a prestigious (and hard-to-come-by) big firm position with a high-paying salary, but if your grades and other qualifications don’t measure up, you likely won’t be offered that job. When applying for a position, take an honest look at what the position requires and what the employer is seeking in candidates. For example, ask:
	+ Does your skill set match the skill set the employer requires?
	+ What are some skills that you need to develop before taking on the position that you’re considering?
	+ What are some of your marketable skills that you can highlight to the employer?
* Practical considerations. From the employer’s location to salary to work schedules, you also need to weigh practical factors that may influence your decision on a particular employer. For example:
	+ Do you want a high salary or simply want to receive compensation that is fair in relation to that of your peers?
	+ Do you want a workplace that embraces merit-based compensation and promotions?
	+ Do you want to attain reasonable work-life balance; want a flexible or alternative schedule; or want to work part-time?
	+ Do you want manageable billable hour quotas and deadlines?
	+ Do you want a manageable commute?
	+ Do you want satisfactory fringe benefits; in addition, do you want job perks—from the company Blackberry to paid lunches?

Excerpted from *Your First Year as a Laywer* by Ursula Furi-Perry (Jist Publishing, 2010).

**Designing a Career Plan**

You’ve assessed your options and considered potential sources of employment—now it’s time to create a career plan that you can put into action to help you find that all-important first position. Designing a career plan isn’t always easy, but having a concrete plan to follow is extremely important.

Here’s one checklist you may find useful when designing your career plan:

* Immediate plans:
	+ Immediate goal:
	+ Requirements for immediate goal:
	+ Marketable skills:
	+ Current career/professional interests:
	+ Implementing immediate plans:
		- Plans for meeting requirements:
		- Plans for seeking employment:
		- Plans for networking:
		- Five new things to learn in order to further immediate goals:
		- Target completion:
* Long-term career plans:
	+ Long-term career goals:
	+ Requirements for long-term goals:
	+ Necessary steps towards long-term goals:
		- Experience:
		- Professional and skills development:
		- Other steps:
	+ Implementing long-term plans:
		- Plans for professional development:
		- Plans for honing important skills:
		- Plans for networking:
		- Plans for any transitions that may be required:

**A Sample Career Plan**

Eve is a new graduate who’s interested in transactional law. She has interned at a public interest organization assisting clients with housing issues. Her favorite law school courses were Property, Conveyancing, and Drafting Contracts.

Eve’s career plan may look like this:

* Immediate plans: to work in private practice the real estate law field.
	+ Immediate goal: to find an entry-level position as a real estate associate.
	+ Requirements for immediate goal: pass the MA bar; possess strong analytical, writing, research, drafting and people skills.
	+ Marketable skills: strong drafting skills; strong academic record; practical representing low-income clients with housing issues.
	+ Current career/professional interests: transactional law.
	+ Implementing immediate plans:
		- Plans for meeting requirements: hone drafting skills; explore private practice areas, particularly at small firms focusing on transactional law.
		- Plans for seeking employment: contact my law school’s career services office for referrals; participate in formal interviewing; contact attorneys I know who may be seeking a new associate; ask for informational interviews with real estate lawyers.
		- Plans for networking: join a trade association for real estate attorneys; join other professional associations; join my state bar’s young lawyers association/committee; keep in regular contact with classmates, colleagues, and professional contacts; attend a seminar, social event, or other networking opportunity.
		- Three new things to learn in order to further immediate goals: 1) how to fill out a HUD financing statement; 2) how to assemble and draft the documents necessary to conduct a proper real estate closing; 3) learn the basics of representing buyers and sellers of foreclosed properties.
		- Target completion: December 1st.
* Long-term career plans:
	+ Long-term career goals: to run my own law firm, focusing on real estate law.
	+ Requirements for long-term goals: build experience working in real estate law; learn the ins-and-outs of real estate law and hone the skills required to represent clients in transactions from beginning to end; build up clientele; build up capital needed to establish my own business; build up professional contacts and relationships.
	+ Necessary steps towards long-term goals:
		- Experience: work for a firm for 5-10 years as a real estate attorney; find mentors who can impart wisdom about working in the real estate field and about founding my own law firm.
		- Professional and skills development: engage in yearly continuing legal education by attending seminars, reading about changes in the law, and keeping up with the real estate field; seek out business development and marketing training; seek out training on
		- Other steps: pay off student loans and other debts within 5-7 years; save 25% of income for 3-5 years to put towards capital for funding the new law firm.
	+ Implementing long-term plans:
		- Plans for professional development: attend at least two CLE seminars per year—one focusing on business/marketing skills, and one focusing on developments in real estate law.
		- Plans for honing important skills: focus on business development and maintaining client relationships; focus on substantive skills.
		- Plans for networking: maintain client relationships; maintain professional ties, including at trade and bar associations; maintain close personal ties with colleagues and others.
		- Plans for any transitions that will be required: business and marketing training; formal training on small business ownership; formal training on money and time management; formal training on human resources and management functions.