

Applying for Jobs: A Resume and Cover Letter are Not Enough.

I'll spare you the long-winded introduction about how these "unprecedented times are radically changing society." Because of the development of COVID-19, you need to find a way to adapt and overcome challenges associated with the job-hunt. Virtual networking should be a natural outgrowth of your pandemic-job-hunt strategy.

During my time at the School of Law I have noticed that many students have success applying for jobs by coupling online portal applications with attending in-person events like On Campus Interviews or the Equal Justice Works Conference and Career Fair. Personally, 8 of the 10 jobs I've had (legal and otherwise) were obtained through some form of in-person networking where the online application was more of a formality than what got me the interview. Merely applying online, at least with a resume like mine, never seemed like it was enough to land a job.

Unfortunately, applying online may prove even *less* fruitful now than before: more people are applying due to a lack of work, and job inquiries are almost exclusively funneled into online application portals since in-person events have been sidelined. Plus, whether anyone wants to admit it or not, there's less jobs available than there used to be. Governments have instituted hiring freezes and many firms have slimmed or eliminated their summer associate classes, upping the competition for *all* legal jobs.

Going beyond the online application portal to network virtually has become essential—simply submitting the resume and cover letter without taking any other actions is too risky in the current legal market. The job-hunt mentality has to be more prospective, scrappy, and future-oriented than it was before. Virtual networking is a great way to increase your chances of finding a job. Virtual networking (1) proves to employers that you have grit and (2) gets your lovely face on their computer screen as often as possible. Take a look at the list below containing a few virtual networking tasks that can help get your name out to employers.

- **Search for WashU Law alumni who practice in certain geographic locations.**

This includes alumni who are where you wish to work after graduation *and* where you reside currently. Leveraging your WashU connection could land you a short coffee meeting (virtual or in-person). Those meetings are valuable whether or not that attorney is practicing in the place you want to be or in the field you're interested in. Why? Because word of mouth travels fast and life is too complex to know who may refer you as a good hire. Don't start passing up free networking opportunities until you have so many that you can afford to be picky.

- **Connect with Facebook and LinkedIn groups containing lawyers you would want to work with.**

Running a couple searches in these social media platforms doesn't take long. Membership in these groups may evolve into valuable information for an interview; someone may remember you attending a virtual networking event hosted by the group; or you may find lawyers posting about job opportunities on the group's page. Be careful, as with all social media, because you don't want

to post anything in these pages that could harm your reputation. When in doubt, there's nothing wrong with passively observing the conversations and learning the information available.

- **Join the Bar association for whatever state(s) you want to practice in—and attend any virtual event you can.**

Every Bar has a “young lawyers division” or something of the sort. For centuries Bar associations have brought lawyers together, and they've gotten pretty good at it. Today, they are still bringing lawyers together even though we can't meet in person.

- **Research and join trade organizations for industries you would want to work within.**

This is not only a private practice consideration—I know the American Association for Justice is a solid organization of trial lawyers geared towards public interest and government law. Usually these organizations function in a chapter format that connects you to local events and attorneys. For attorneys geared toward private practice, these organizations can help you meet clients in the industry you want to serve. Showing an eye for book-building may make a prospective employer think you're someone that could provide value to them in the long run.

- **Update and clean out your social media pages.**

This is strictly my advice based on the pool of employers I've talked to, so feel free to completely skip this section if you'd prefer because it *definitely* is not gospel.

If I met with you for a Peer Career Advisor meeting, I'd advise you to make sure you tailor your social media to the type of field you want to be in. If you're going into public interest, it is probably important that you demonstrate you care about current events enough to post articles you find interesting, and if you're comfortable, take a position—whatever it may be. Public interest work is fueled by compassion and conviction. Employers want to see that you've got enough *gravitas* to take jobs that are some of the toughest in our profession (and sorely under-appreciated).

With respect to private sector work, I think you'll find that many employers steer away from polarizing topics—having a more reserved page may help avoid sending any signals that turn-off a prospective employer. One hiring partner told me, “I try to imagine seeing the kid working late in the office day in and day out—meeting after meeting. Then, I imagine whether I think I'd enjoy being around them that much.” For better or worse, private practice is more about whether you can deliver large quantities of work product and get along with everybody. Your social media page can answer that question for employers one way or another, so put good thought into what's on it.

- **If you can do so safely, volunteer in your community.**

Volunteering is a great way to meet people. And, the people you meet volunteering are generally awesome people because it takes a special person to cut time out of their day to serve their community. “Rome wasn't built in a day,” and you won't meet your next boss or client by just going to one mixer either. Try to build a web of people you know, and you'd be surprised at how one lead can feed into another. Plus, volunteering makes you happier—trust the science!

- **Read local and relevant news.**

Many of you probably do this anyway to stay informed about what is happening around the country—keep it up! If you're like me, you could probably afford to increase the amount of news you take in every day. It doesn't have to be hard work either, merely skimming a few stories for 15 minutes a day can really make a difference! The key is consistency. Reading more articles over time helps you to track ongoing stories and stay up to date on what's happening.

Reading news published by certain magazines also builds industry knowledge that can be leveraged as an extra-resume asset. Although any news (from a reputable source) is beneficial, local news can prove even more valuable. Around the water-cooler, local news is king because of its proximity to your firm or public institution. This is especially true for government and government-adjacent jobs, where the local news can literally give you a 15-minute head start on the fire your boss is about to tell you to put out. Furthermore, if you are applying into a job market far away from where you currently reside, staying fresh on the local news can help persuade a prospective employer that you are serious about moving to the region.

- **Take a job *anywhere* and put in some solid work.**

Many of us envision a dream job every day. The dream job is great fuel and can push you to work harder on whatever it takes to get there. But, there's really no job you can get *right* after law school that is a true dream job. No matter what job you take, there's going to be faults and shortcomings. That isn't because you aren't a good applicant or because it's a bad job, but it's because that's just the nature of entry-level positions.

Regardless of firm or institution pedigree, “real recognize real.” No matter what, if you take a job that gives you at-bats then you have a chance to build a reputation of excellence—and that carries more weight than almost any resume line from law school. Go to work, *anywhere*, put in as much effort as you absolutely can, and find a way to make lemons into lemonade as often as possible. There's a 50% chance that you can build your *dream* job from the same office you sit in at your *first* job. Either way, it won't take long for recruiters to start calling you with offers, and then you can jump into that dream job knowing that you've earned your stripes.

Of course, it's hard to find motivation to do anything while we're quarantined at home, let alone balance school *and* an aggressive job hunt. I have not done half of the things on that list I just gave you—but if you manage to knock out 2 or 3 items, it could go a long way.

I encourage you to do a little bit each day and reach out to the Career Center if you have any questions along the way. Good luck, and happy hunting.