



# The graduate's guide to boosting your legal career

Tips to help carry you from where you are to where you want to be.

BY ALEXANDRA SUMNER

**Y**ou are almost there. You have endured three years of grueling classes, long nights of studying, and final exams on topics that were absolutely not covered in class. Yes, you still have the bar exam to conquer, but you can see the finish line: graduation and finally a legal career.

But getting sworn in as an attorney doesn't mean you stop learning or growing. Law grads who continue to focus on improving themselves find greater success and satisfaction as attorneys.

So to help, here is advice on ways to boost your legal career.

## 1. Networking and volunteering

LaShaila Spivey isn't your average lawyer. A graduate of Indiana University Maurer School of Law in Bloomington, Ind., Spivey knows that if you don't go big, you go home. And as the first lawyer in her family, she wasn't about to give up easily.

Right out of law school, Spivey took a position at one of Indianapolis' top law firms to practice intellectual property.

She found herself underwhelmed by the culture and focus of the firm.

Meanwhile, she saw a lot of unmet needs in the Black-owned business and Black-creator sectors, and she decided she was going to fix that. So she did something brave: She quit her job and started her



Spivey

## Networking and volunteering tips

Nervous about networking? Wondering how to turn a volunteer experience into professional connections? Here are five fast tips to help you prepare:

- Develop and practice your elevator speech.
- Identify your current network's strengths and weaknesses.
- Think of ways you can bring value to a professional relationship.
- Imagine every volunteer opportunity as a networking event.
- Considering volunteering outside the legal profession to build a broader variety of professional connections.



own firm.

"I created my law firm to create a safe space for me to practice law while also serving my community," Spivey said. "I decided that I would create my own firm, where mental health, work-life balance and overall health would be respected, while serving clients with IP-related legal needs.

Spivey finds clients by networking, volunteering and through referrals. She has volunteered with the state Intellectual Property Inn of Court for the last few years and has been highly involved with the intellectual property committees of both her state and local bar associations.

Volunteering her time and experience has helped her meet a variety of IP professionals and build a diverse and robust professional network.

"Part of the legal profession requires networking and maintaining relationships," Spivey said. "By networking and reaching out to attorneys — especially former classmates and colleagues — I have received lots of referrals that have resulted in new clients for my firm."

## 2. Mentoring and membership

During law school, Luis Hernandez was the exact type of person you'd want in your class. He was smart and attentive, but most importantly: he wasn't — and still isn't — afraid to ask the difficult questions.

That tenacity has translated into a successful litigation career for Hernandez, an Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law graduate. He now works at Bose McKinney & Evans in Indianapolis and has found a way to leverage his professional memberships into actual, tangible benefits.

Hernandez has been a member of state and local professional associations since law school. He has also taken continuing legal education courses in a variety of practice areas to see what he liked, which is saying something when you're already up to your eyeballs in assigned reading.

Hernandez also dedicates time to professional and leadership development. He was recently chosen to participate in the Indiana Latino Institute Leadership



Hernandez

Circle, a prestigious two-year program that connects up-and-coming Latino professionals with community leaders and assigns them a mentor with whom to discuss career goals and development. He said monthly meetings with his mentor have proved to be an immensely positive experience.

Hernandez said that being an active member of the American Bar Association allows him to network with attorneys around the country.

## 3. Furthering your legal education

If you're willing to put in the time, effort and money for relevant certifications, it will all be well spent. If you're

not looking to make that level of commitment just yet, consider signing up for some continuing legal education courses in your practice area. You may even be able to get your employer to pay for them.

One of the hardest things about being a lawyer is keeping up with complicated and constantly changing laws. Staying up to date on these changes is an absolute requirement of the job.

Spivey and Hernandez are both great examples of what happens when you take intentional steps to boost your legal career. Both took internal audits, determined what they would need to develop their careers, and took steps to make that happen. They understood that a successful career doesn't take place just between the hours of 9 and 5 and that they would need to put in extra time and effort for successful career advancement.

But the best advice anyone can give you on the subject is this: career advancement isn't something that just happens; it's something you work at constantly.

No one is responsible for your career growth except you. And focusing on the career advancement tips outlined above can help carry you from where you are to where you want to be.

---

Alexandra Sumner is a practicing attorney and a regular columnist for The National Jurist.

## Mentoring and membership tips

Surprisingly, these two topics go hand in hand. If you're looking to take the next step in your career, a professional membership just might be the tool to get you there.

Several professional associations have mentorship programs, reduced-fee (or free) continuing legal education, and even programs for resume review.

If you are currently a member of your state or local bar association, make sure you are taking advantage of everything membership has to offer.

