

LEGAL CAREER SELF-ASSESSMENT

Why is self-assessment important?

People who engage in self-assessment have a tremendous advantage in the job search and career development process. These people tend to find jobs more quickly and they are more likely to obtain jobs that they find satisfying. Their job searches are more efficient and effective.

You will be happiest in a job that utilizes your natural talents and is consistent with your personal values. By taking the time to inventory your skills and accomplishments and analyze your goals and motivations, you will develop focus and direction. Focus and direction lead to confidence and enthusiasm. Your enthusiasm (or lack thereof) during an interview often makes or breaks the interview. Self-assessment, therefore, can be critical to obtaining the job of your dreams.

Law students and lawyers tend to be goal-oriented, intent on achieving results and closure. The result is a job search that focuses on one question: "Who will hire me?" With that single-mindedness steering you, you are likely to (1) suppress or ignore your own preferences, (2) try to make yourself fit into the obvious choices, and (3) end up competing with others whose preferences naturally lead them to that type of work. The result is failure, partly because you cannot muster the passion and enthusiasm that impresses employers, and partly because you lack the commitment that motivates you to hammer away at potential leads until they turn into opportunities.

Too often, law students and lawyers feel at the mercy of a bad job market, that job satisfaction is a luxury, or that they need to take just any job rather than the "right" job. In reality, honing in on what you are good at and what you like frequently has a greater impact on your job search than whether the job market is "good" or "bad." In addition, you will be most effective in obtaining and excelling in a job that uses your natural talents and fits with your values, the same qualities that lead to job satisfaction.

What is self-assessment?

Just as reading about exercise and diet won't improve your health, reading about self-assessment without actually answering the questions and engaging in some self-reflection won't assist your career development or lead to job satisfaction.

Self-assessment is, in essence, taking the time to explore your answers to the following questions:

- *Who am I?*

More specifically, what are my goals, motives, priorities, values, and personal style?

- *What are my intellectual interests?*

What captures my attention when I read a newspaper or book; what classes do I most enjoy?

- *What do I have to offer an employer?*

More specifically, what are my accomplishments, skills, natural talents, and innate interests?

- *What do I want from a job?*

More specifically, where do I want to be located? In what kind of physical environment do I want to work? What kind of relationship do I want to have with co-workers, clients, and others? What kind of hours do I want to work? What kind of a workload and what level of responsibility do I want?

How do you go about self-assessment?

Set aside a specific block or blocks of time to go through the self-exercises in this handout. You do not have to do all of the exercises at once. Break them up into groups. Note that some exercises will take more time and mental energy than others. Make sure the time you spend on the exercises is quality, uninterrupted time. You will only get as much out of the exercises as you put in. Besides, you (and your future) are worth it!

Keep your responses together and accessible in a notebook or file. Review your responses periodically to find patterns and themes. As you complete each exercise, you discover new aspects of yourself and clarify your overall preferences. For most people, the most fascinating subject they can study is themselves. Thus, most people find the process enjoyable, as well as practical.

Remember, self-assessment is not a one-time activity. Every time you obtain new information about your talents, interests, or values or about a particular work environment, note the insight in your notebook or file.

WHAT MAKES WORK MEANINGFUL FOR YOU?

Read the six qualities listed below and rank them in order of their importance to you, with 1 being the most important and 6 being least important. Be certain to answer the way you really feel, and not the way you think you ought to!

The best work for me would:	Rank
1. Make use of my special talents.	_____
2. Pay me well.	_____
3. Let me be creative and original.	_____
4. Make me well-known and respected.	_____
5. Let me work with people, rather than things.	_____
6. Give me an opportunity to help others.	_____

Add the points for the statements paired below and write the totals in the space provided.

_____	Statements 1 and 3 (SE)
_____	Statements 5 and 6 (PO)
_____	Statements 2 and 4 (ER)

Now, rank the three pairs, with the lowest total ranked number one (your highest value) and the highest, number three (your lowest value).

EXPLANATION OF RESULTS

ER refers to “external-reward.” If this is your highest value, work that brings wealth, prestige, power, security, status, respect or similar rewards also brings personal fulfillment. If external reward is your highest value, you are well-suited to the law. The first time you introduce yourself as a lawyer, you’ll receive some of the reward you seek.

If you value external reward and are just starting your legal career, your best bets are employment in conventional areas of practice with private, corporate, public interest or government legal employers. As you proceed through your career, you might want to run for political office, lobby for a judicial appointment, or network your way into a management position with a former corporate client.

PO means “people-orientation.” You need to work with or help other people, rather than concentrating on data, ideas or things. In law, those with a people orientation ought to represent individual clients--not business entities or faceless classes--or have frequent interaction with others. You will also prefer to work with client needs and problems that the legal system can directly remedy, such as plaintiffs’ personal injury or employment law work, legal services to the poor or disadvantaged, guardianship or probate, family or elder law, and consumer problems. Outside the profession, you might enjoy being a therapist or counselor, or working in education, placement, or employment counseling.

SE means “self-expression.” The ability to be creative and to express yourself in your work is very important to you. Those who value self-expression need to deal in more creative areas of practice, such as fast-paced trial work, deal-making, or emerging or rapidly changing areas of law. Also, the more autonomy you can create for yourself, the more chance for creativity you will find. For that reason, self-employment is often attractive to those with this preference. Legal writing, especially for a newspaper or magazine, could provide a good opportunity for self-expression. Outside the legal profession, journalism, entrepreneurial values and the arts can be satisfying options.

Those with a strong preference for self-expression are likely to become dissatisfied with law over time. Early in your career, you’ll have much to learn and many opportunities to talk, write and create solutions. Later, you’ll probably discover that the rules and repetition of the legal environment, as well as your role representing someone else’s interests, stifles your ability to express yourself. To avoid dissatisfaction, you’ll have to find outlets for your creativity, whether in your work or in your free time.

The emphasis you place on certain values can change during the course of a career. Many lawyers start out seeking external reward in the form of the certainty of employment after graduation. Once they become established in the profession and enjoy the financial security and status they sought, a need for self-expression or helping others might take precedence.

Qualities Helpful for Success in the Practice of Law

The following traits are among those essential for the practice of law. For each characteristic, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1= very little; 5= very strong) indicate the extent to which you believe you possess those qualities.

Analyze data	1	2	3	4	5
Assimilate new data quickly	1	2	3	4	5
Be self-directed	1	2	3	4	5
Conceptualize	1	2	3	4	5
Conduct legal research	1	2	3	4	5
Counsel clients	1	2	3	4	5
Deal with people	1	2	3	4	5
Decide in pressure situations	1	2	3	4	5
Demonstrate commitment	1	2	3	4	5
Demonstrate good judgment	1	2	3	4	5
Demonstrate political judgment	1	2	3	4	5
Develop business	1	2	3	4	5
Develop rapport and trust	1	2	3	4	5
Digest large quantities of material	1	2	3	4	5
Draft documents	1	2	3	4	5
Empathize	1	2	3	4	5
Explain complicated ideas in simple terms	1	2	3	4	5
Follow through	1	2	3	4	5
Formulate strategy	1	2	3	4	5
Gather facts	1	2	3	4	5
Get along with colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
Inspire confidence	1	2	3	4	5
Interview	1	2	3	4	5
Keep confidences	1	2	3	4	5
Listen critically	1	2	3	4	5
Manage complex tasks	1	2	3	4	5
Manage people	1	2	3	4	5
Mediate	1	2	3	4	5
Negotiate	1	2	3	4	5
Organize	1	2	3	4	5
Produce	1	2	3	4	5
Put in long hours	1	2	3	4	5
Research	1	2	3	4	5
Retain information	1	2	3	4	5
Solve problems creatively	1	2	3	4	5
Speak persuasively	1	2	3	4	5
Summarize	1	2	3	4	5
Synthesize	1	2	3	4	5
Work well under pressure	1	2	3	4	5
Write persuasively	1	2	3	4	5

For each characteristic you believe you possess, be prepared to cite specific examples of situations where you demonstrated that characteristic.

Values

Values are those intangible principles and standards that bring meaning to your work and motivate your involvement and commitment. You need to ask yourself what your values are and which hold the most meaning and importance to you. People tend to feel most comfortable when surrounded by others who hold similar values and in situations where their values are appreciated. The following exercise will help you further identify career/work values and factors crucial to your job satisfaction.

Rate the importance of each item

A=Very Important

B=Important

C=Not Important

- Achievement
- Advancement
- Aesthetics
- Affiliation
- Altruism
- Authority & Power
- Autonomy
- Being Needed
- Boss You Respect
- Challenge
- Change
- Closure
- Commitment to Goal(s)
- Competition
- Complexity
- Control
- Courage
- Creativity
- Direct Impact
- Discovering New Things
- Diversity
- Economic Return
- Effectiveness
- Ethics
- Excellence
- Excitement & Adventure
- Fairness
- Profit/Gain
- Public or Client Contact
- Recognition
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Results of Work Seen
- Reward
- Salary
- Security
- Self-Development
- Self Expression
- Service
- Simplicity
- Flexibility
- Focus
- Harmony

- High Profile
- High Risk/High Reward
- Holistic Approach
- Improving the World
- Independence
- Individuality
- Influencing People
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Intellectual Stimulation
- Interesting Work
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Job Security
- Justice
- Leadership of Others
- Lifestyle Integration
- Mentoring
- Morality
- Originality
- Personal Growth
- Pleasant Surroundings
- Pleasure & Fun
- Pressure & Fast Pace
- Prestige
- Social Relevance
- Specialization
- Stability
- Status
- Structured Environment
- Supervision
- Supervision of Others
- Training
- Traveling
- Variety
- Working Alone
- Working on Teams
- Other

Review the values you ranked "A" and order these from 1 to 10 in order of importance to you. Keep in mind that like motives, values may shift as you get older, but most guide your choices throughout a lifetime.

