

PRACTICAL CAREER ADVICE FOR YOUNG INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS: HOW TO BUILD A KILLER RESUME, NETWORK EFFECTIVELY, CREATE YOUR OWN OPPORTUNITIES, AND LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER

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I. INTRODUCTION

For those who are serious about careers in international law, there are probably too many applicants for too few jobs.¹ While there are certainly many volunteer opportunities available, law-related jobs that pay and offer

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1. The desire for a career in international law, for some young lawyers, is simply a desire for exotic foreign travel. Little do they know, however, that travel gets old fast if you do too much of it. Not all travel is glamorous, and some of it is even dangerous. Beyond the travel is the work itself; which will not always involve negotiating treaties. The daily work may be as mundane as determining the appropriate tariff classification for a manhole cover from India.

both international exposure and career satisfaction are in short supply.² You cannot skim the "help wanted" ads to find a job as a judge on the U.S. Court of International Trade, or as the U.S. ambassador to another country.³ For most of us, then, we will find it necessary to create our own opportunities in international law. By creating these opportunities, we can create our own destinies.

II. BACKGROUND

Every person's career track is unique, and should be. This "background" section is my personal background. Most of you should skip this part and go directly to the good stuff in the next section (you can always come back and read this part later). Some of you will be interested in reading about my own experiences, and how I turned them all into a happy career.⁴

My family came to the United States from Germany, Switzerland, and, judging from my last name, Poland. Like many of you, I was fascinated by these other places. I started learning German in high school, and found it more than doubled my understanding of the world. I started learning the history, politics, geography, literature, and art of Germany, Switzerland, Austria and even the Principality of Liechtenstein. As I learned about things hidden from classmates who could not read German, I recognized how much more there was to learn. I dabbled in Spanish and French, realizing I could "double my world" again with each additional language. With the help of my family, I took my first trip to Europe, where I took summer classes at the Schiller Academy in Strasbourg, France. This first trip gave me the bug for travel.

My first year of college was at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. I chose the school in part because it had a first year foreign study program in the small Bavarian town of Passau. I lived with a German family and three wonderful roommates from Greece, Haiti, and Iran. German was our only common language, and the total language immersion was a valuable experience.

I transferred to Bradley University in my second year, to attend foreign policy classes at the International Studies Institute. I found additional off-campus study places including foreign policy classes at

2. By "pay," I mean a job salary that will cover your rent, food, credit card minimums, an occasional movie or compact disc, and student loan payments (which will likely dwarf the previous categories combined).

3. Federal judges and ambassadors must be nominated by the President and approved by the U.S. Senate. U.S. CONST. art. II, § 2. Usually new law graduates need a job faster than this Senate confirmation process will take. See, e.g., Lisa Neff, *Clinton Returns Hornel Nomination to U.S. Senate*, WINDY CITY TIMES, Jan. 21, 1999, at 7.

4. For the sake of brevity, I have eliminated all adversity and disappointment from this personal background. Only good things have happened to me in my life.

American University in Washington, D.C., Russian and Welsh at Trinity College in Carmarthen, Wales (with a trip to Russia and Ukraine), and my first classes in international law at the University of Vienna, Austria. I spent some additional time traveling wherever my Eurorail Pass could take me. When I returned to Bradley to get my diploma, they changed the off-campus study rules so that no one could duplicate my magnificent absence from the college. If they were going to grant me a degree, they should at least have gotten some tuition money out of me. I received a B.A., *cum laude*, with a double major in International Studies and German. I was completely fascinated by the world, and I was looking forward to taking my place in it. I knew, for example, that relations between nations were governed by treaties, and that lawyers were the ones who actually negotiated and reviewed the treaties. It was time to go to law school.

I applied only to The John Marshall Law School in Chicago based upon having met some John Marshall alumnus who were exceptional lawyers. Because I was still questioning whether I wanted to become a lawyer, I also applied to be a Peace Corps volunteer. German wasn't a useful language for the Peace Corps, however, as those German-speaking countries were already pretty well developed. I received a wonderful education at my law school. I took classes in international law, comparative law, and international business and trade. I participated in the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition in my second year, and liked it so much I participated again in my third year. I did well in my classes and even became one of the editors of the law review. I sought out teachers who would talk with me about international law issues, cultivated their friendship, and sought their advice on my hopes for a career in international law. I helped with research for their law review articles and learned to locate and use a wide variety of international research materials. Being a faculty research assistant is a wonderful job, because you learn as you earn.

My mentors convinced me -- correctly, I think -- that before I could be an effective international lawyer, I would have to have a solid domestic basis. I could not help my foreign clients if I did not know the practical aspects of the legal system in my home country. I applied to be a judicial clerk, and received a clerkship with Justice D. Nick Caporale of the Supreme Court of Nebraska. Thus, my international career began in Lincoln, Nebraska. I enjoyed being a clerk for a judge. I successfully applied for my next job, working over the next two years as a clerk for Judge Dominick L. DiCarlo on the U.S. Court of International Trade, in New York City.

There are three reasons to clerk for a judge. First, you get to learn from the mistakes of others. As you watch other attorneys mess up in the courtroom or in a brief, you can learn how to avoid making the same mistakes. Second, you get to learn how a judge thinks. If you ask your judge why he or she reached a particular decision, you will learn what facts or authorities were most persuasive. You will also learn what is less

effective, and what may even backfire and kill your case. Third, based on learning from the mistakes of others and the thought process of a decision-maker, you have a credential and experience that no one can take away from you.

My clerking experience proved to be valuable in the market place, as I obtained a good position as an associate in a leading customs and international trade firm in New York. I worked on a variety of exciting matters and made a wonderful salary.⁵ I was also inclined to write, and with two other associates I wrote an international trade chapter for a book on New York Law and Practice.

Armed with my practical experience, additional education, and a publication, I eventually entered the field of legal education.⁶ I started guest lecturing in classes on international business and trade, and later co-taught classes with Professor William Mock. With help from him and from my other mentors, I turned this into a full-time position in 1992. I was hired as a writing teacher, but I also taught or co-taught courses in international business and international human rights.

In addition to my teaching and full support for scholarship, I was able to travel internationally on programs that helped build the international reputation of my school. I spoke at conferences in Canada, China, and Japan. I co-taught a course in international commercial law at our sister school in Lithuania. While there I met U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor as part of the regional meeting for the American Bar Association's Central and Eastern Europe Law Initiative (CEELI). I used my academic credentials to obtain permission to legally visit Cuba,⁷ where I visited places where they confined persons who tested positive for HIV (Cuba tested all persons in the country for HIV and put them in "sidatorios" when they tested positive).⁸ I also visited Haiti during the time when the military had ousted the democratically elected president. I hoped to help document some of the human rights abuses being perpetrated there. I attended an academic conference in Guyana, and explored problems of judicial administration with a Supreme Court justice (who instead wanted to discuss the widely publicized American trial of O.J. Simpson). I took a leave of absence for a year to accept a position with the

5. At night, I took classes at New York University School of Law, to deepen my knowledge about things such as the United Nations Convention on the International Sale of Goods, the various corporate structures of companies in Latin America, and international protection of intellectual property rights.

6. For more information on how to become a law professor, see Mark E. Wojcik, *Survive and Thrive in Academia*, 13 CHIC. B. REC. 36 (Feb./Mar. 1999).

7. Academics and journalists received exemptions from the U.S. ban on travel to Cuba. See 31 C.F.R. § 515.416 (1998).

8. For more information on the human rights issues involved in this public health issue, see Mark E. Wojcik, *Inside Cuba's Sidatorios*, OUTLINES (Jan. 1993) reprinted in ARTHUR S. LEONARD ET AL., AIDS LAW AND POLICY 548 (1995).

Supreme Court of the Republic of Palau, where I watched a nation gain its independence.⁹ I spent a summer teaching in China at our sister school in Hangzhou and at the Chinese Patent Office in Beijing, where our school's intellectual property program helps to train patent examiners and attorneys. I made two trips to India as a guest of the Indian Law Institute, to address international conferences dealing with the legal issues of AIDS and of narcotics trafficking. I attended other conferences in other countries, and I attended many international law conferences and seminars here in the United States.

I continued to write on international issues and I continued to teach legal writing every semester. I even started something of a specialty in teaching legal writing and research skills to attorneys and law students who did not speak English as their first language. A mentor who had been watching me build this skill put me in touch with the International Law Institute (hereinafter ILI) in Washington, D.C. ILI has a successful training program to introduce U.S. law to lawyers from other countries, and graduate students who are starting LL.M. programs in the United States.

I recognize that my experience has been exceptional and privileged. I know that many others will never have the opportunities that I have had. But I also know that when I was a first year law student, I had no idea of the adventures I would have in the ten years after my graduation. I had doubts about my "international" career when I took my first job in Nebraska, which did not seem to offer many international opportunities. I recognize the power and privilege of my present position as a law professor, and I hope to use that position to help students and young lawyers start their own careers in international law. For some, this will be a full-time quest. For others, the "international" portion of their work may comprise only a small part. For all of us, we often fail to recognize the international results of the daily work we do in helping to preserve and promote the rule of law.

The world is big enough to accommodate us all. The legal needs of the world are such that we cannot satisfy them all. The advice I offer in the next section is meant to help stimulate your own dreams of an international career and to help you convert those dreams into a prosperous reality.

9. The Islands of Palau are in the west Pacific Ocean, near Guam. When I arrived in Palau, it was a United Nations Strategic Trust Territory, administered by the United States (and using a good deal of U.S. case law in its court system). I was privileged to be there on October 1, 1994, when the Republic of Palau became an independent nation, and when the U.N. Trusteeship system came to an end. During my year in Palau, I worked on a book to document this transition and to preserve some of Palau's judicial and political history. See OFFICE OF SUPREME COURT COUNSEL, *THE QUEST FOR HARMONY: A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF LAW AND JUSTICE IN THE REPUBLIC OF PALAU* (1995).

III. USEFUL ADVICE FROM A WISE OLD MAN

I am now thirty something. For most readers of this journal, I qualify as being a wise old man. Read on and absorb my wisdom.

A. *Start at the Beginning: Write Your Resume, or Review the One You Have*

If you have not yet written a resume, make that your first task. If you need help on doing this, consult a legal resume writing guide¹⁰ or see if your Career Service Office has guidelines for your use. If you already have a resume, be sure it is up to date. Once your resume is done (or nearly done), make an appointment with the Career Service Office at your school and ask them to meet with you to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your resume.¹¹ The services of your school's career service office will still be available to you even if you have already graduated, so do not be shy about using them. If you no longer live near your alma mater, call them anyway and arrange for a telephone consultation to discuss your resume (you may also email or fax your resume for comments) and reciprocal career service arrangements that your school may have with the career service offices of other schools near where you currently live.

When you meet with the Career Service Office, be as specific as you can about your dream job. If a listing for that job comes in later that afternoon, the persons you told will know to call you first, even before they post the job for others to see.

B. *Join a Student Group, or Start Your Own*

If you have finished your resume and it looks weak, see what you can do to build it up quickly. Have you joined the International Law Society at your school? I'm amazed at how many students seeking "international" careers will not even take this simple step. The "dues" are usually nominal, if there are any at all.

At some schools the International Law Society may be dormant, which sometimes happens after the president and other officers graduate without electing successors. Find out what you need to do to start it up again. Congratulations, you have not just become a member, but you have likely also become the new President of the International Law Society. This advice holds true for any student organization. If you are interested in international child abduction, you should join the Children's Law Society. If you are interested in the new international criminal court, you should

10. See, e.g., KIMM ALAYNE WALTON, *GUERRILLA TACTICS FOR GETTING THE LEGAL JOB OF YOUR DREAMS* (1995).

11. Before you meet with your friends at the Career Service Office, you should drop off an advance copy of the resume so that the comments you receive are more meaningful.

join the Criminal Law Society. If you are interested in international issues affecting the environment, you should join the Environmental Law Society. If no society exists directly affecting your interests, you should start a new one.

C. *Invite Prospective Employers to Speak to Your Student Group*

Students are often surprised at the generosity of attorneys and others who will agree to speak to their groups. Most will do it for free. If they won't do it for free, ask someone else.

If you don't know who to ask to be a speaker, ask a professor (usually your faculty advisor, but don't limit yourself) to speak on a recent international development or to give suggestions for speakers. The Career Service Office and the Alumni Office will also have names of potential speakers. Ideally, you want to invite speakers from places where you want to work. If you want to work at the largest international law firm in town, invite a partner or senior associate from that firm to speak to the student groups. Make the speaker feel important. Create a nice sign to announce the event, be sure the room is set up, and find an audience. One way to double a potential audience is to co-sponsor your event with another student group. You instantly have twice the membership base for your speaker. Be the one to greet the speaker at the door and be sure that the speaker learns your name. Gush about your speaker's accomplishments during your introduction. Have a camera to take pictures of the speaker during the talk, and later with you. Send a thank you letter after the event and include a copy of the photograph if you both look good. Put your names on the back of the photo and jot down the date and place of the event. Give a copy of the photo to the student newspaper and ask them to run it. Send a copy of the paper to your speaker, who will enjoy the unexpected additional publicity. Do not enclose a resume, the time will come for that later.

D. *Network or Not Work -- The Choice Is Yours*

If you simply cannot arrange for your dream employer to speak to your group, you can nonetheless ask a leading attorney for an "informational interview," one in which you simply hope to learn about the type of work that the person does and whether or not it would be something that you would also like to do. Do not drool during this interview and do not violate the ground rules by asking for a job. Use the informational interview to find out what the person does, whether it brings them job satisfaction, and what training they found most helpful to their careers. Listen more than you speak. As the Stoic philosopher Epictetus observed, nature gave us "one tongue but two ears, that we may hear from others

twice as much as we speak."¹² If you listen, you may find that the particular job is really not one in which you are interested. If you have learned that, you have likely saved yourself from much future agony about a wrong career move.

The previous paragraph assumed that you would be able to identify appropriate persons for informational interviews. That assumption may not be valid. You must learn to network as well. Network, or not work. Don't be shy about meeting people and being sure that they know your name and your interests. Start networking with people you know, such as friends of your family who may be lawyers or business executives. Network with alumni from your school. When ending an informational interview, the most important question to ask is "who else would you recommend I speak with?" Then make sure that you do speak with that person. Send a thank you note to everyone who gives you an "informational interview." Proofread it before you mail it.

Even if you are "just a student," get a business card, and learn how to use it. When you go to a bar association meeting or other function, ask the speaker for a business card. It isn't difficult to ask: "May I have your business card?" Of course, it may be better to say, "I really enjoyed your presentation, you have an interesting background/perspective/skill. May I please have your business card?" You can ask for speakers' business cards even when you know you could find their addresses in the phone book. When you ask for a business card directly, you allow the speaker to respond by saying, "Why of course, here it is. Why don't you come by my office sometime for a visit?" A range of other responses is also possible, but unless the speaker has run out of business cards, the response to you will rarely be "no."¹³

E. *Join a Bar Association Committee, or Start Your Own*

One of the most effective places to network is at your local bar association.¹⁴ If you are looking for a job in the law, you are likely to find

12. THE GOLDEN SAYINGS OF EPICETUS 183 (Charles W. Eliot, ed., Hastings Crowley, trans., 1980). "Epictetus is a main authority on Stoic morals. The points on which he laid chief stress were the importance of cultivating complete independence of external circumstances, the realization that man must find happiness within himself, and the duty of reverencing the voice of Reason in the soul." *Id.* at 116. Because he stressed the importance of complete independence of external circumstances, Epictetus would be in complete agreement with everything I say in this article.

13. In those rare cases when the answer is really "no," it is better to learn that sooner rather than later.

14. For disclosure purposes I must admit that I am a big fan of organized bar associations. I have found them to be invaluable to my professional training and career development. The individual lawyers who I meet at bar association functions are some of the finest lawyers I have ever met. I currently am a member of the Board of Managers of the Chicago Bar Association (CBA) and was a past chair of the CBA's Committee on Military Law

employers at bar association meetings. If your bar association has committees that interest you, be sure that you join them. If your bar association does not have committees that interest you, find out how to start a new one.

Assuming that the bar association has a committee of interest to you, you should attend a meeting and introduce yourself to the chair and vice chair of the committee. Offer your assistance to them they will appreciate your offer and remember your name. You can offer to help organize a single speaker for a future meeting, or, more ambitiously, offer to help organize a panel of speakers for a continuing legal education (CLE) program. You can offer to write or edit a newsletter for the committee. For some strange reason, no one else wants this job even though it gives you an opportunity to promote your name and will give you visibility within the bar association committee. Be sure that the newsletter becomes a place where committee members will post job openings. When you are the editor of the newsletter, you also will be the first person to see that new job listing.

When working on programs, remember to identify topics of concern to other committees. The criminal law committee, for example, may be interested in a program on recent developments in extradition. Whatever topic you choose for a program, be sure to focus on recent developments in that area. Audience members are more likely to come if new information is discussed rather than presenting things they can read about in hornbooks.

F. *Intern or Volunteer*

Some of the best experience you can get (and contacts that you can make) comes from jobs that don't pay (or don't pay well). Get course credit for an internship when you can. The grade you get on an internship won't usually do violence to your grade point average, and you will, by nature, focus on the academic aspects of your experience. Even if you don't get course credit, there is nothing wrong with volunteering and working in a non-legal job (note: not an illegal job) to cover your expenses while in school.

Ask professors what projects they are working on (or would like to be working on), and, if they are also of interest to you, ask if they need a competent and energetic research assistant (if you ask if they need competence and energy, the answer will be yes). You will likely get paid for your assistance, although you may also do the work as an independent study project with appropriate subjects, materials, and guidance from the

and Veterans Affairs. I also was the founding Chair of the CBA's Committee on the Legal Rights of Lesbians and Gay Men. In the American Bar Association, I am currently on the International Human Rights Steering Committee for the ABA Section of International Law and Practice.

professor. If getting paid is not a requirement, you can volunteer to help me on an upcoming law review article or book.¹⁵

Look in the law library at your school. Does it have a "Guide to International Legal Research" listing sources available in your law library? If your library doesn't have such a guide, offer to help write one with the librarian. You will gain a new friend and ally, what you write may be published somewhere, and you will become the school's leading authority on international legal research sources.

Volunteer to work on an upcoming political campaign. The candidate you help to get elected may become a United States Senator and may take you with him or her to Washington.

If you're in a city like Washington or New York, look around for volunteer opportunities. You may apply to be an intern at an organization such as the International Law Institute, for example. Even outside major centers of international activity, there are many opportunities to volunteer with private groups, such as Amnesty International, or government agencies, such as an international visitors center or a local export promotion office.

G. *Teach English to Foreign Lawyers -- Use My Book*

You may find yourself in another country where English is not spoken as the primary language or you may find yourself in the United States with lawyers or law students who speak English as a second language. Even if you have never before been an "English teacher," you can help lawyers, law students, and business executives to learn the special language of American law. If you do not speak English as your first language, it may take you two or three hours to understand the difference between "probate" and "probation," or to understand why we give "consideration" to the concept of "consideration" in a contract. Fortunately, there is a wonderful new book that you can use to start teaching English.¹⁶ As you teach this class, you may also find opportunities to increase your own foreign language abilities.

H. *Have Something to Say (in French, or even just English)*

If you hope to work in international law, you must be informed about current events. You may find yourself at a cocktail party or a seminar needing to say something meaningful about the state of the world. You should read a newspaper with good coverage of international issues. The

15. Send resumes to: Prof. Mark E. Wojcik, The John Marshall Law School, 315 S. Plymouth Court, Chicago, IL 60604 USA.

16. MARK E. WOJCIK, INTRODUCTION TO LEGAL ENGLISH (International Law Institute 1998). Further information about the book is available on amazon.com. You can use this book to teach a single person, a small group, or a small class of lawyers from other countries who want to improve their English.

New York Times and the *Christian Science Monitor* are good choices. You should also read a newspaper or news magazine from outside the United States, to give you differing perspectives on the issues (and, more than likely, news other than the current Presidential scandal). Choices here include the *Financial Times* (aptly described by one Italian man as “The London version of the *Wall Street Journal*”), the *Economist*, and *World Press Review*. Check your law school’s library for these journals, or see if you can remember where the public library is (remember that place?). If you do not have easy access to foreign news sources in print (not all of us live in New York or Los Angeles), learn how to get these foreign news sources off the internet. Be careful how you use your “surf” time, however, and stay focused on news that will benefit your career search.

You cannot limit yourself to newspapers and the Internet. You must also tackle more complex readings on international developments. *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy* are two well-known journals that will give you the depth of analysis that you need to cultivate. International law journals are an obvious choice as well.

I. *Write Something. Before You Publish It, Ask An Expert to Read It.*

You need to have a writing sample, no matter what. You may as well have a writing sample that has been published somewhere. As you read articles from law journals and bar association magazines on a regular basis, you will realize that writing an article is also something that you can do. Pick a topic about which you already know something, or pick a topic about which you would like to learn something and write it up. Do not be afraid of making mistakes in what you write. Mistakes happen. Even the current edition of the venerable *Black’s Law Dictionary* states that “[i]n order to be valid . . . treaties [*sic*] must be approved by two-thirds of the Senate.”¹⁷ Wouldn’t Williston and Prosser be surprised to learn that their books are not valid because they were never subjected to United States Senate confirmation? The definition should read “treaties,” of course. In reviewing student papers, I often must read about violations “of the statue [*sic*],” and I wonder what piece of art has been vandalized. I read about the decision of the “trail court,” and wonder if it meant deciding whether to camp for the night. You must proofread your drafts carefully to avoid these errors; do not rely solely on spell check or on the skills of your editors.¹⁸ While you may be able to survive these errors at a later stage of your career (say, for example, post tenure), you cannot afford to make such mistakes when you are building your reputation.

Beyond simple proofreading, however, is the need for serious substantive analysis of what you have written. You should not hesitate to

17. BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY 298 (6th ed. 1990).

18. An exception to this advice may be made when writing for the *ILSA Journal of International and Comparative Law*, a journal with a top-rate editorial staff.

send drafts of your articles to leading authorities in the field and to ask them to look at your work before it is published. If they agree, you will have the benefit of their expertise. Remember to thank them appropriately and to credit them for their assistance. After they have reviewed your article, you can also ask them to have a look at your resume. Your resume may be perfect by this point, but ask them anyway for their advice about it. If you haven't landed a job by now, there may be a way to re-craft your resume or to deliver it to an appropriate hiring partner or agency.

IV. CONCLUSION

Follow the advice here, and live happily ever after. Pay off your school loans as quickly as you can so that your future job decisions may be made on the basis of the personal enjoyment that the job will give you rather than on your "need" for a certain salary. You can only live happily ever after when you are not worrying about your wallet. Some people have a way of spending just a little bit more than they have, and it is a hard habit to break. Keep your eyes on your ultimate goals, and be sure that you have those goals down in writing along with a reasonable time frame for each of your goals. As you achieve success, take notes along the way so that you can better share your secret with others. Take this article and improve upon it. Send a copy to me. You will make an old man smile.