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Life after on-campus job interviews

For rising second-year law students throughout the country, August is On-Campus Interview Month.

OCI is a complex process through which law firms select students they will invite back for job interviews for summer associate positions. Many of those firms then hire the same students for permanent positions following graduation.

The process is harrowing, and the pressure intense. But for those students who choose not to go through OCI or who fail to land a position with an OCI firm, there comes a second critical phase — finding a job outside of OCI.

To clarify, the majority of legal positions out there don't come through OCI. Since 2008, large firms (the majority of OCI employers) have reduced their hiring. Most small to midsize firms don't interview until law grads have taken and passed the bar exam. Government and public interest jobs also generally hire after grads have taken and passed the bar exam.

Moreover, some law students are looking for alternatives to traditional practice.

"Big firm practice is not for everyone," noted Marianne Deagle, assistant dean of career services at Loyola University Chicago School of Law. "Many law students prefer to work in small or midsize firms depending on their practice area interest or in alternative careers, such as in compliance and consulting, where having a J.D. is an advantage."

Finding a job takes patience, perseverance and, most importantly, a plan. What should you do if you didn't land a position through OCI or don't want a Big Law job in the first place?

Take a deep breath. It is easy

to feel like you're the only one in this situation, but you're not. It is a tough legal job market. You may be angry and frustrated, but don't let that get in the way of your job search. The worst mistake you can make is to spend too much time doing nothing but licking your wounds or waiting for something to come along.

Make an appointment with your career services counselor, and follow his or her advice. Members of your career services staff have seen all the permutations, and they can help you. Don't let pride, disappointment or lethargy keep you from going in or from taking their advice.

Be responsive to your counselor, listen to and apply feedback and check in regularly. Yes, it's hard, but you will feel better being "in action" rather than waiting for something to happen.

Whether or not you work with your counselor, there will be a list of things to tackle.

Clarify your objectives

The more clear you can be about what sort of position you want, the more others can easily help you. "I just want a legal job, any legal job" is not an objective that will inspire others to help you.

Identify the one or two geographic markets and one or two practice areas in which you would like to work. More than that will dilute your efforts and make it hard to tell a convincing story when you are interviewing.

Make sure your tools are in place

Once you have clarified your objectives, take a look at your resume, cover letter and networking e-mail with a fresh and critical eye. This is another area where your counselor will

PROFESSIONALISM ON POINT



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be an invaluable resource.

Your career services office has given you model documents, and you should follow them. Remember that your career services staff has helped many before you land positions — they know what documents work and which don't.

Network relentlessly

The thought of networking strikes terror into the hearts of many experienced lawyers, but it is really nothing more than communicating with people to build connections and relationships.

It is also the single most critical part of your job search. The ins and outs of networking warrant whole columns of their own, but I'd suggest doing the following four things:

- Let your "inner circle" know what you are looking for.
- Do targeted informational interviewing with people who are working in the practice setting you are interested in.
- Work the law school

community. Contact recent graduates and current students who worked or are working in places you'd like to work. Talk to your professors and school administrators.

• Join a few relevant bar associations or affinity groups and attend meetings. By relevant, I mean those devoted to a mission or area that you feel passionate about or at least connected to.

Common to each of these four categories: Keep track of who you've met and what they've suggested. A simple Word table or Excel spreadsheet will work fine. Thank everyone, whether or not you believe they will be able to help you, and always be listening for ways you can help them (anything from a law-related article to the name of a dog-walker or restaurant).

Lastly, if someone has been helpful, seems interested in you and is in the practice area, firm or even the city you want to be in as you are thanking them for their time, be sure to ask what I consider to be a magic question, "You've been so helpful; who else would you recommend I speak with?" Add the names to your spreadsheet, and you will always have "next steps" at the ready.

Stay organized and focused and stick with your plan

There is no way to determine which seeds you plant will bear fruit, so you must keep planting. Keep adding names to your spreadsheet, keep it up to date. Keep reaching out to new people, and make sure to follow up promptly with those who have been kind enough to meet or speak with you.

While there is no one formula for landing the job you want, following these steps will make sure you are doing what you can to improve your chances.