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# ***How to Start Building Your Social Justice Career***

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## Lay a Foundation of your Social Justice Career Now

- Get out there, meet the players and foster relationships
- Networking pays off both in the immediate and long run
- Promote yourself and establish connections (personal and professional)
- Plant the seeds for future opportunities

## Research and Get to know the players

- Identify your areas of interest: refugee, human rights, environmental law, Aboriginal law, criminal law?
- Find out who the lawyers & organizations in town or other cities that you should get to know?
- Connect with them while in law school and inquire about internships, part-time or volunteer opportunities

## Project Confidence

- As you go through the journey of building your social justice career, you will need to build and project confidence
- First impressions matter and employers remember reliable and confident interns, students, etc. and go back to them first before holding a competition
- your vision and commitment can set you apart; show a positive and pleasant attitude

## Experience, Experience, Experience

- The most difficult part of starting your legal career is building your experience
- Find out the leaders in the social justice field and meet them at talks, events and conferences, etc. Check out their profiles, learn about their experiences and ask them questions about it
- Find and connect with mentors to help you shape and build your experience and open doors for you; mentors are a fabulous resource and their insight, support and guidance is invaluable

## Set Yourself Apart

- Do a clerkship, work at a clinic, get a paper published and whatever else that can set you apart, with a focus on the particular social justice area that interests you
- working for a judge is fabulous learning experience; adds value to your profile and opens other doors for you and your social justice career
- Internship overseas? Something unique that adds colour to your CV, demonstrates your initiative and your passion, all of which makes people want to meet you

## Your Starting Point

- You may start in a position at the government, or in the private sector, or working for a sole practitioner
- You have to build your career strategically; develop the skill set you need, so you can choose where to go next
- Whether you want to do social justice work, or something else you have to leverage your experiences to go to the next step

## Find Out Your Options

- You've got the research skills, so put them to use and find out your options now
- Speak to someone doing that work; meet for coffee and get them to talk about their career path and ask them questions; trust me, they will remember you
- Think outside the box and be creative; not everyone takes the same path to get there



## Focus on 1-2 Practice Areas

- It is a good idea to get exposure to different practice areas early on, but you need to also build expertise in one or two practice areas
- Follow the main developments in those practice areas, such as SCC or other appellate court decisions
- Write blogs about topics that interest you as a way to build your profile

## Get Involved and Get Recognized

- Get involved, get recognized and get your name out there through a community organization
- Join the CCLA or OBA/CBA as a Student, join a committee or a working group, become editor of a newsletter
- Attend some of the CLE sessions related to the practice areas of your interest

## Get Litigation Experience Early on

- Doesn't matter so much in certain practice areas
- But early litigation experience helps give you the edge
- The skills are transferable to other areas
- Criminal Defence is a great way to get litigation experience

## Advocacy Skills Count

- The art of advocacy, both written and oral, is at the heart of practicing law
- Whether you are drafting pleadings, arguing a case in court, negotiating a deal, you are advocating for your client
- You have to be persuasive, assertive and professional

## Your Reputation Matters

- By doing everything discussed so far, you are also building your reputation
- Need to be careful and not compromise your reputation
- Things can get tough but cutting corners comes back to bite you!

## Start your own Practice?

- Possibly interested in starting your own practice?
- Educate yourself on the steps involved: Resources: LSUC, Law Pro, Mentors, Books, Articles
- Read “Guide to Opening Your Practice”, Law Society of Upper Canada, 2010, available online:  
<http://rc.lsuc.on.ca/jsp/home/practiceGuides.jsp>

## Starting your own Practice?

- See also LSUC Practice Management Guidelines:  
<http://rc.lsuc.on.ca/jsp/pmg/executiveSummary.jsp>
- Check out Law Pro, Practice Pro for Practice Aids:  
<http://www.practicepro.ca/practice/default.asp>
  - retainer agreement precedents
  - tips on client relations and firm issues (such as conflict of interest, mentoring, practice finances)
  - ILA Checklist
  - Limitation period charts
- Speak to other lawyers in your practice areas of interest

## Back to Your vision

- Brainstorm: Put your idea & creativity to work
- Design your logo and slogan
- Think about the niche of focus that would be developing



## Build your Website

- Serious player with great potential
- Design a top notch website and say yes to content management
- IT is your friend, so you need to make friends with IT
- Add-ons for your website: online booking and twitter integration
- Build a mobile website

## Build your Practice

- Choose your practice areas and learn them well
- Get access to legal databases
- Situate yourself strategically: stay downtown and close to the Court House
- Again, don't be shy to ask for help from mentors

## Create an Inspiring Work Environment

- Demonstrate leadership to your team
- Recognize talent and give opportunities to bright, hardworking students
- Diversity matters
- A positive environment fosters creativity and confidence

## Advertise

- Learn about Google places, google ads and analytics
- Be careful with SEO (search engine optimization)
- Quality website content is very important
- Promote yourself: blog, write papers, publish and present
- Build your profile and bring in more business

## Continue Networking and Building your Connections

- Referrals from other lawyers and people in the community
- Join associations such as the CCLA, Advocates Society, Criminal Lawyers Association, etc. and others
- Continue to build and expand your connections

## It's a Business: Invest and Be Patient

- Starting a practice is essentially starting a business
- You need to invest in it both financially and with your time
- You need to be patient and have a 2-3 year plan.
- Stay focused, determined and you will succeed