



FIRST JOB  
JITTERS:  
HOW TO NAIL  
THE FIRST  
IMPRESSION

# START WITH WHY -- UNDERSTAND THE ASSIGNMENT

- This process can be dependent on your supervisor:
  - May offer clear, concise, simple directives, or
  - Unclear, incomplete, or hurried expectations
- Regardless, try not to leave their office without a standard set of questions answered. Carry form/check list in with you each time so you can ask follow up questions.



# LEARNING ABOUT YOUR NEW ASSIGNMENT– LOGISTICS

## SAMPLE CHECKLIST:



- Who is the client?
- What is the expected format of the assignment?
  - Who is the final recipient of the assignment?
- When is the deadline?
- What is the billing/client number (if applicable)?
  - Do you need to code into the billing process/track time, etc.?
- How much time should the assignment take?
- How would the attorney prefer you to follow up?
- Should you spend additional time reading background files?

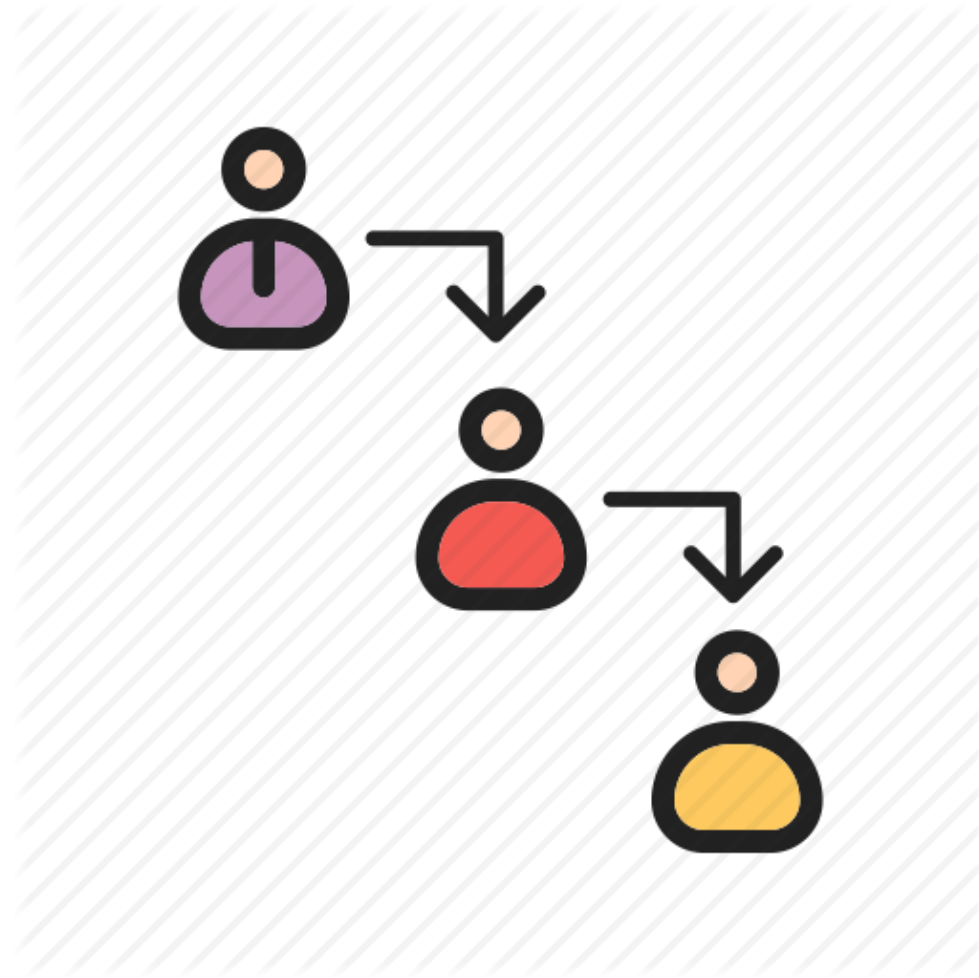
# LEARNING ABOUT YOUR NEW ASSIGNMENT– QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LAW

- What are the relevant areas of the law?
- Are there any sources (aside from case law) that the attorney prefer you use?
- If you are unable to find relevant law in this state/district/circuit, would the attorney like you to check in before branching out?
- Is there a specific case that that attorney thinks would be helpful to start your research?

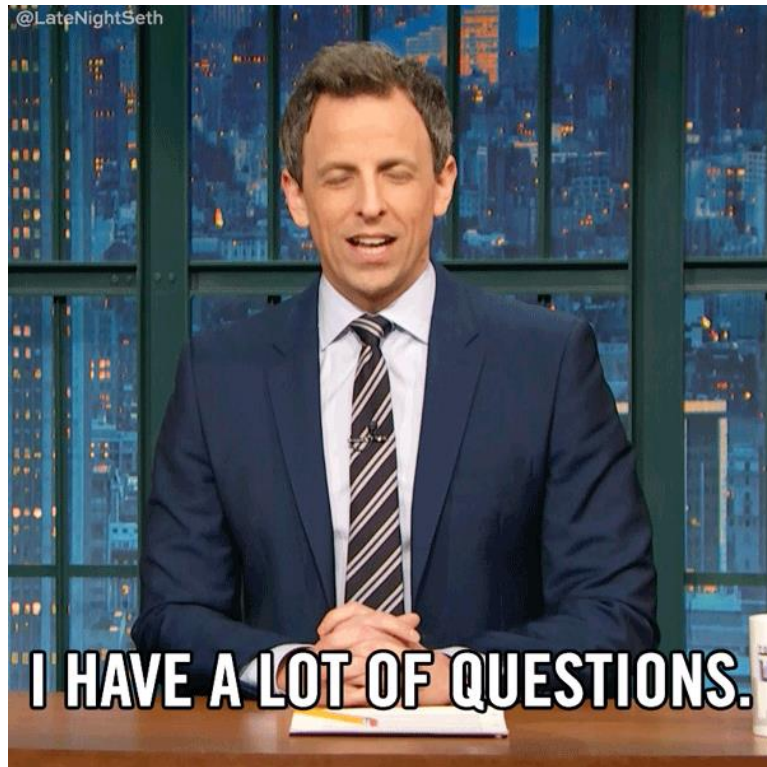


# IN THE BACKGROUND

- Is this attorney reporting to another attorney in the firm?
- Find out the attorney's preferences
  - Secretary, paralegal, another associate
  - Document "stalk" – Don't reinvent the wheel.
  - Writing style
  - Formatting



# UNDERSTAND THE FACTS OF THE CASE, ASK QUESTIONS



- Most research is law-to-fact analysis. Therefore, it's crucial to understand the client's facts and how they apply to the situation.
- Identify if the situation falls within a general rule, or if you need start developing/exploring exceptions.
- Unclear? ASK! Know that attorneys generally want a fact specific analysis, not a legal treatise.
- Assess where you want to go, frame your research accordingly

# UNDERSTAND COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

- Your time is being billed to client, give them a product they're happy to pay for, specifically consider:
  - Possible outcomes for various actions
  - Consequences for some decisions
  - Ways to minimize costs/risk
  - Alternative courses of action
- Supervising attorney will factor this into the conversation, clients should be aware of all risks and your best judgment of a situation
- Be time conscious, you are accountable with your time. If the partner cannot bill it, then the firm eats that time (maybe worth the learning, but maybe not.)



# FOCUS ON COMPLETE RESEARCH, MULTIPLE AUTHORITIES

- First: What is the question? What is my goal?
- Know your case, review filings, understand prior issues and their disposition
  - Refresh on dispositive issues (if relevant/timely) to keep in mind when proceeding {e.g. summary judgment, SOL issue, etc.}
- Next:
  - Is there statutory authority? (Think: Federal, District, Local, etc.)
  - What does the case law/precedent say?
    - Brief the critical cases in the main case you cite for support (Anticipates the next request from your attorney)
  - Other sources that may help?
    - ALI/ABA, Restatement, law review, CLE publications
- Keep a record of all research, and get clear expectations or limitations of legal databases (WestLaw, Lexis)
  - CITE CHECK!





# MAKE A JUDGMENT CALL



- Know the balance between expedient solutions as opposed to careful and thorough analysis.
- If asked to provide an answer, give it. There may be a temptation to argue either side, but this doesn't lend credibility to your ability to analyze and issue decision on the issue. Pick a position and defend it (with evidence and clear, succinct analysis).
- If speculating on unknown facts, present alternative answers and state the factual assumptions you are basing them upon.
  - Give answers up to the brick wall, meaning if there is a determinative fact you need, say so.

# COMMUNICATE WITH SUPERVISING ATTORNEY, EARLY AND OFTEN

- Do not delay in seeking guidance on projects, facts, cases. Know the chain of command so you can follow up with someone else in the absence of the supervisor.
- Even without issues, schedule brief and succinct check in conversations to seek confirmation you're heading on the right path.
  - Don't overdo it – They don't want to babysit you; but if you ask for general guidance and the project gets off course it helps CYA on your work



# LEARN LOCAL RULES, FORMATS, TEMPLATES (LEGAL ASSISTANT)



- Don't make attorneys correct basic formatting issues, citation styles, or header issues
- It's your responsibility to learn the local rules, firm formats or attorney preferences
  - Legal assistants or paralegals are invaluable here!
  - When in doubt, search the server for a prior sample template, and/or ask for one when you get the assignment – Model on a good draft!
- DO NOT reinvent the wheel
  - But!! Don't over rely on prior copies, they may have typos and mistakes. Once you submit the document it's your name on the page. Own it.

# ANTICIPATE WHAT YOUR CASE WILL NEED NEXT

- Learn the case as best you can, and always look to the next step. If you're prepping for a deposition, then prepare a list of possible questions, exhibits, etc.
- Reviewing a case? Brief it, and others relevant to the issue or reliant/foundation to the primary case.
- Prepare a comprehensive case timeline so you can understand what's coming down the pipeline and be prepared for where the case will focus next.
  - Draft of the next document, formatted and started, but hold for further instruction (don't waste your time)
  - **TIMELINE!** Both for the case facts, and procedural (what's done with file date, and what's coming up next with deadlines)
- Very impressive to already have a case briefed, project started, or half done when it's assigned.



# COMPLETE WORK ON TIME

- Obvious that this practice is deadline driven, do not wait until the last minute to do a project (they often take longer than you anticipate, either through issues or because a supervisor doesn't get back to you).
- Build in cushion time or a false deadline to motivate yourself.
- Turn it in a day or two early (if it's a solid product) and show you can manage your time effectively
  - Don't be the kid who finishes the exam first only to fail because everything is wrong.
- **Critical punchline:** If you are assigned a task, DO IT. Don't let it fall off your list. If a supervisor asks for something more than two times, you've got a major problem.
  - Don't independently decide it's beneath your attention or not a priority. Ask if you're pinched on time.



# FOLLOW UP ON THE ASSIGNMENT AFTER COMPLETION



- Be available for critique. Ask for red lines/review on your work after you turn it in.
- Know that you're new, of course your work will need refinement; seek that guidance so you can improve!
- Never let an attorney give you the same critique twice!
  - Attorneys (like most people) hate wasting their time. If you keep repeating the same error, attorneys will simply give up and correct the errors themselves. This is bad for you.
  - Keep old drafts to refresh
- *Helpful hint:* When you get a red line, date it at the top, and staple the fresh document (with corrections & the date submitted to the attorney) on top so the attorney can see the progression of the work. Also, if they re-correct their first correction, you have documentation.
  - Digital? 'Save-As' and 'track changes' are your friends. Keep copies!

# MAKE A COMMITMENT TO LEARN

- Ignorance is your greatest enemy, which is to say, what don't you know?
- It's understandable to be insecure, you're new, but in many ways, this is a *strength*; capitalize on your newness to learn! You can't (or shouldn't) need to ask some of these questions 5 years into practice.
- If you don't know the word/statute/legal concept, ask a few questions for additional details or context, then do your research – find the answers! Still stuck? Ask your attorney to fill in the blanks.
- Note: **Too much silence is bad.** If you were getting work, now you're not, then it's possible they're frustrated and over trying to help. Get proactive in fixing the problem.



# AVOID MISTAKES THAT RESULT FROM LAZINESS, MISCOMMUNICATION OR POOR JUDGMENT



- You're going to mess up. Don't let it be a silly error.
- Cite-check, watch for names, be clear about which position you're arguing, check your spelling, and **PROOFREAD!!**
- Don't miss the forest for the trees; pay attention to details but look up to gauge the big picture so you don't miss something obvious.



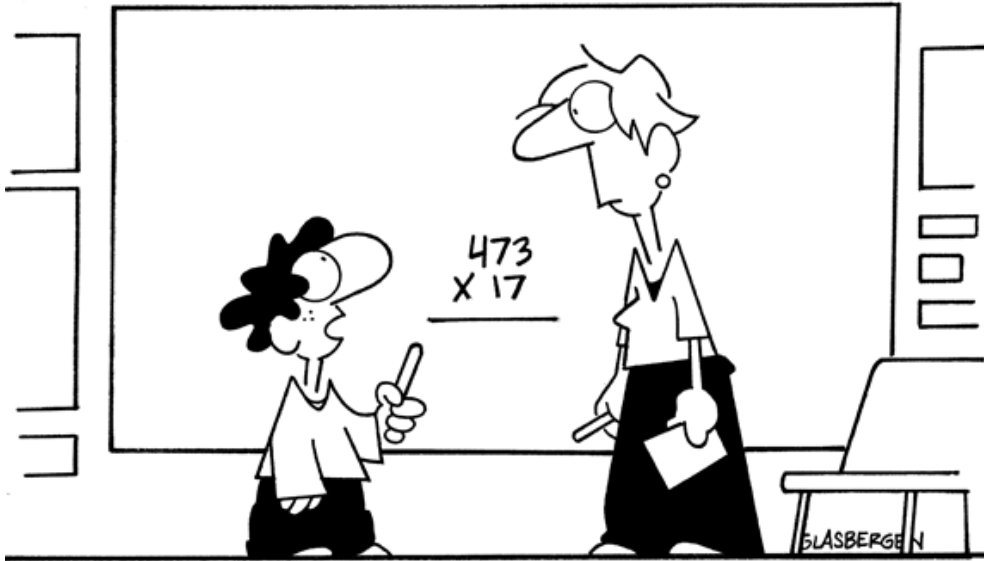
# DON'T OVER-COMMIT

- Being the new hire, you will serve many masters; as such, it's normal to have multiple assignments. If one attorney assigns a task, keep a clear timeline/calendar of your tasks and obligations so you can communicate effectively when the next attorney gives you an assignment.
- Try taking on as much as possible but know your limits! It is disastrous if you take the task and fail to deliver (or deliver a bad product), much worse than saying you're overbooked on the front end.
  - Also hurts the attorney who is now working late to correct and file the assignment (read: very unhappy supervisor)
- Timeline crunch on two projects? **COMMUNICATE!**



# HANDLE MISTAKES PROPERLY

© Randy Glasbergen / glasbergen.com



**“If we learn from our mistakes, shouldn’t I make as many mistakes as possible?”**

- If you discover the mistake, work to remediate the error and communicate it to the primary contact on the case when necessary.
- Take responsibility! Don’t minimize or offer excuses; it speaks to stronger integrity if you’re willing to take the hit and learn rather than distract and avoid.
- Work hard to mitigate the harm from your mistake.
- Overall: Learn from the error! Make adjustments so you don’t repeat the mistake.

## USE OTHER STAFF AND INTERNS AS A SUPPORT NETWORK

- Treat other interns and associates as colleagues, not competitors. Focus on producing a good product, not upstaging your co-workers. It's obvious and generally off putting to your supervisors.
- Support staff are the keys to the office, they can be a tremendous asset, or a huge roadblock. Treat them with respect! They know far more than you about the office, attorney preferences, etc.
- The quality and accuracy of your work is your responsibility, not theirs.
- Try to avoid office politics, gossip and negative individuals.



# PRIVATE FIRM: LEARN THE ART OF BILLING



- Most firms bill by the hour in 15 min increments. It's important that a client can read the billing statement and understand what you've been doing.
- Be complete and accurate in your descriptions.
  - Helpful Hint: "Thinking" is not enough...
- Don't discount your time if you feel you've been inefficient or are embarrassed it took you so long, a supervising attorney will do that as they see necessary.
- Record throughout the day, don't do it at 5:00, you will miss time.
- Many programs provide timers, use them!
- Ask to see supervising attorney's notes/records for guidance!
  - Also, a great way to see a timeline of the case; an office manager can usually pull a complete invoice with little trouble.

# SUMMER POSITIONS: THIS IS AN INTERVIEW – IF NOT HERE, ELSEWHERE

- Know that you are being evaluated by both attorneys and staff throughout your time with the firm, in and out of the office.
- Social drinking: It's ok to have a drink at a social function, limit to one, maybe two. Never drink during the work hours, nor should you feel pressured to drink at any time if that is not your preference.
- Even if this job ends (summer, leave to next position, etc.) your future employer will call to ask about you!
  - Guard your reputation!!



# NETWORK: WORK WITH ATTORNEYS IN THE FIELD YOU'RE INTERESTED IN



- Opportunity to explore an area of the law you're interested in, take advantage!
- Not getting that work? Ask for more, or to attend court/client meetings/depositions with them.
- Ask good questions, follow up!

# SEEK FEEDBACK

- Often firms will represent they offer great mentorship and feedback, but you're the bottom of the priority list, so make yourself heard!
- Don't wait until the end of the summer, or your annual review to speak up or find out someone is dissatisfied with your work.
  - Beware of *too much* silence
- Follow up on completed assignments for feedback and review.
  - Solicit one good attribute or strength and one area for improvement if you learn an attorney is reluctant to give feedback
- Early feedback gives you time to remediate before a review and lends credibility to your professionalism.

