

# **An Associate's First Year**



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**A Guide to  
Thriving at a Law Firm**

Edited by

**Jennifer L. Bluestein**

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Founding Member of North Star Attorney Search, LLC

# Preface

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I still remember the first time I really gained a sense of how challenging the first year of practicing law can be for new attorneys. I had just begun my second year of practice, and I went out to dinner with an associate who was one year ahead of me. She listened as I told her about how I was looking back at all the things I did not know coming out of law school. “I can’t believe how much I didn’t learn in law school,” I told her. And my friend replied, “Welcome to your first year of law practice. You survived!”

It was a difficult year because I didn’t even know what I didn’t know until faced with an assignment that made me feel like I had just wasted three years and many thousands of dollars on law school. I constantly felt lost and overworked. I couldn’t even read fiction because I was so tired at the end of every day. And yet, after one year or so, things just started to click. I realized that little by little, I knew what the partner or senior associate wanted when she or he assigned me something. I could anticipate the next step in a matter before being asked. I was able to come up with novel approaches to cases that seemed to have no winning argument. That was when I knew I was a lawyer. It wasn’t when I graduated; it wasn’t when I was sworn in. It was when I knew what to do next without being instructed. That was a beautiful realization. I had gone from deciphering the Rule Against Perpetuities and The Mailbox Rule to drafting a Summary Judgment Motion that could be filed without having ten rounds of red-inked revisions.

As a result, my confidence grew immensely. As I see the new attorneys around me, what separates the aspiring associates from the star associates is their confidence. They

know they can do it, and so they do. I hope this book will help you, our readers, acquire this confidence quickly. Your level of confidence will make your career a successful one, and it will help bring satisfaction with your chosen position. But if it doesn't, this book is also designed to help you understand what to do next. Get to know yourself and play to your strengths, and if you find that the daily practice of law isn't what drives you, find the confidence to explore something else. And have fun whatever you do!

JENNIFER L. BLUESTEIN  
October 2018  
Chicago, Illinois

# Acknowledgments

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Many people spent a lot of time to make this book become a reality. I would like to thank Lori Wood at PLI for spending the time to consider every word and nuance in every chapter. She has been a wonderful editor and a real value-add in the best way. And of course, PLI's support and risk-taking to enter into the new associates space shows a true dedication to the profession and new attorneys everywhere.

Thanks also goes out to each and every author in this book, because the time they each took to translate their knowledge into readable form was significant. Greenberg Traurig and Brad Kaufman were both completely supportive of this project, which I truly appreciate. And finally, I want to thank my family for their constant support, from my husband, Mike Fink, bringing me coffee in bed, to my daughter, Jaxanna, helping me decide where I needed an extra comma, and my son, Bennett, cracking a joke to end my cranky mood. My parents, Maris and Maurice Bluestein, each set an example by publishing their own books, and my sister, Karen Bluestein, edited many books over the course of her career. Now the pressure moves on to my brother, Richard!

Finally, to the readers of this book, thanks to each of you for attending law school and continuing to believe in the legal justice system despite some tumultuous times. Always remember that you are an officer of the court, and it is a privilege to understand the law and have access to it. It is our role to share that access with others.

