

# 10 Thoughts for New Lawyers from Two Graduating Young Lawyers

by Scott Powers and Patrick Burt

The Young Lawyers Division is one of the most active and populous sections of the Utah State Bar. Lawyers admitted to practice in Utah are automatically members of the Young Lawyers Division until they have more than five years of experience or they turn thirty-six, whichever is later. For most young lawyers, the first several years of practice are critical because they set the stage for a lawyer’s entire career. Now that we are aging out of the Young Lawyers Division, we would like to share some lessons, observations, and recommendations culled from our combined nearly two decades as young lawyers.

### 1. Know the law.

Few things frustrate practicing attorneys more than young lawyers who are ignorant of the law in their particular field. Not only does this frustrate your peers, it costs your client money. A young lawyer’s relative ignorance in the law can be changed into a strength, however, due to the ever-changing nature of legal precedent. Indeed, we have prevailed on several motions where the opposing counsel relied on an outdated, and inaccurate, version of the statute. Similarly, know the rules. Look at the Rules of Civil Procedure before approaching others with questions and expect the first response to any such question to be “What do the Rules say?” You will be surprised how much is covered by existing rules and statutes.

### 2. Do not take cases personally.

As an attorney you are required to zealously represent, and advocate for your client. However, taking your client’s issues personally can lead to incivility when dealing with opposing

counsel and stress in your personal life. Like a boxer, you need to “leave the fight in the ring.” If you learn to compartmentalize your zeal, you will be able to sleep easier and maintain beneficial relationships with your fellow attorneys.

### 3. Your reputation is precious.

Utah is a relatively small bar. Judges talk to each other; lawyers talk to each other; and, clients talk to each other. Treat every business or social interaction with care so as not to offend or burn bridges. A reputation for honesty, professionalism, and proficiency will lead to smoother dealings with opposing counsel, more referrals from fellow attorneys and clients, and more respect from the bench.

### 4. Do not get discouraged.

Being a young lawyer has many challenges, from finding a job, learning the law, and juggling debt incurred from law school to building a practice and trying to make partner. As with all things in life, there will be disappointments. Nevertheless, having an upbeat attitude will help you weather the storm. In fact, studies show that your subjective attitude, and confidence, plays a vital role in your overall success. As stated by Morrissey, “just do your best and don’t worry.”

### 5. Own your mistakes.

Carman Kipp, the founding member of Kipp and Christian, P.C., was famous for saying “If you are going to eat crow, eat it while it’s fresh.”

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You will make mistakes; there's nothing to prevent it. Tell someone above you immediately so you can fix the mistake. Do not try to avoid it or fix it on your own; it will only make things worse.

**6. Make connections.**

Make friends among the other lawyers. Be involved in your community. Making lasting connections within your profession and within the general community will help you develop your practice and make it more fulfilling and enjoyable.

**7. Perform service.**

Getting involved in the community and helping others is extremely rewarding. As an attorney, you have a unique skill set that the public prizes and sorely needs. Be generous with your time and provide service, including pro bono service. Not only will this help the community, it feels good and may even help you build your practice in the future.

**8. Enjoy being a lawyer.**

Some may say that you are “too nice” or “easy going” to be a lawyer. This is a good sign. Being a lawyer is your profession; it is not your life. If you are like us, you got into law because you

found joy in the challenge. Do not lose sight of that.

**9. Think before you hit “send.”**

We live in a fast-paced, technology driven world. It is too easy to send an email, write a letter, or make a heated comment that, in hindsight, should not be sent, written or uttered. Before you know it, your words are in the hands of a supervising partner, circulated among the bar, posted in break rooms, used in civility presentations, and/or placed in front of a judge as an exhibit. See No. 3 above.

**10. Get involved in the Young Lawyers Division.**

This is an amazing group of people. Comprised of attorneys from many of the most influential firms and organizations in the state, the Young Lawyers Division provides attorneys with an opportunity to network with their peers to a degree not possible in any other setting.

As young lawyers, you are embarking on a career that can be as rewarding, or as miserable, as any you can imagine. Although the ten suggestions above are not a failsafe roadmap to professional happiness, they are a good step in the right direction. Good luck and welcome to the Bar.

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