

PART 1: The Truth About Law School, on-Campus Interviewing, and BigLaw

Chapter 1: Setting the Record Straight

Everything you've been told about being a lawyer is wrong

If you're an ambitious young lawyer who wants to do good in the world—and do well financially—you should seriously consider plaintiffs' law.

I know you're probably thinking: *Everyone knows the money comes from BigLaw and the impact comes from public interest work.*

Yes, you were told that. I was even told that when I went to law school a hundred years ago.

But let me ask you a question: *What if everything you've been told about the legal profession is wrong?*

Maybe “wrong” is too strong. Maybe you've been told only a fraction of what you need to know to make an informed career choice?

Here's the truth: ***Law school does a poor job of showing you all of your career options, including what I believe is the best option . . . becoming a plaintiffs' lawyer.***

Law professors on average practiced law for just 3.7 years, which means most of them never had enough experience to understand and then teach others about the real world practice of law. They're not able to guide you on a career path because most of them never traveled on one. Without substantial real-world experience, their career advice is necessarily limited, and woefully incomplete.

Law schools today are not much different than when I went to school over thirty years ago. They're very good at teaching theory, but they don't do a good job giving you the knowledge to choose a career path. Which means that you, just like me, will have to figure all of this out for yourself.

And the stakes are real:

If you get it wrong, you'll spend 80,000 to 100,000 hours trapped in a career you hate.

If you get it right, you will spend your life doing work you love.

The real cost of choosing the wrong career path

The mental health consequences of getting it wrong are severe. Lawyering is among the most stressful jobs there are. On average, American lawyers rate their career happiness at 2.6/5, which puts it in the bottom 7 percent of all US careers.

According to the American Bar Association (ABA), lawyers experience depression at rates 3.6 times higher than the general population. Other studies indicate that lawyers have a depression rate of between 28 and 46 percent—compared to 6.7 percent for all other US careers.

Many resort to substance abuse to cope. In a 2016 study by the ABA, it was reported that between 21 and 36 percent of lawyers qualify as "problem drinkers." In contrast, the general population has a problem-drinking rate of approximately 8 to 10 percent.

Suicide rates are even more alarming. The ABA reports that 11.4 percent of all lawyers have experienced suicidal thoughts. Other studies show that ***suicide rates among American lawyers are six times higher*** than the general population.

Bottom line: If you choose the wrong path you're either going to burn out, quit practicing law altogether . . . or worse.

So ask: ***Don't you owe it to yourself to do the work necessary to find the best legal career path for you?***

Questions to ask yourself to determine your ideal career path

As you consider your career, ask yourself some general questions:

- Would you rather represent plaintiffs, or defendants?
- Would you rather seek justice, or deny it?
- Would you rather fight for David, or defend Goliath?
- Would you rather choose your battles, or have them assigned to you?

Let's get specific. Would you rather:

- Prosecute greedy fraudsters, or defend them?
- Hold polluters accountable, or shield them from liability?
- Take on deadly drug manufacturers, or protect them from lawsuits?
- Fight for victims, or for the corporations that harmed them?
- Hold the rich and powerful accountable, or protect and enable them?
- Build a career you're proud of, or just collect a paycheck?

I never even thought to ask myself these questions, and no one suggested that I ask them either.

That's why I wrote this book. Because you need to ask yourself questions like these in order to find your way.

I think there's a better path, but you've never been told about it.

For many of you, ***the best answer to these questions is a career in plaintiffs' law.***