

Alternative Careers and Things to Consider

Before you become convinced that you don't want to practice law, take some time to think about what it really is that you don't like.

Common reasons students say they want an alternative career:

1. You don't think you can get a job practicing law because:
 - a. I don't have good enough grades
 - i. Almost everyone can overcome their grades – the best way to find a job is through people and activities
 - b. It'll be easier to find a job outside law – not true
 - i. You will need to convince people why you no longer want to be a lawyer
 - ii. You will be competing with people who are more expert in the area you now want to pursue
 - iii. Your law degree may work against you; some employers may think they are the default or that you are overly qualified
 - c. I can always come back to law if I don't like my alternative job choice
 - i. It is very difficult to come back after having never practiced. It is much easier to take the bar, practice for a while, and if you decide you don't like it to pursue another career
 - ii. If you decide to not practice, the closer your non-law job is to a practice area or legal topic, the easier it will be to go back to practicing law
 - d. I can't imagine working with people like my classmates
 - i. People who have had a bad law school experience often say this
 - ii. This is a generalization that is unfair – there will always be people in any job/line of work you like and dislike
 - e. You had a bad work experience during the summer
 - i. It may have been the wrong job for you in the wrong setting
 - ii. There is no single law job that represents what “practicing” law is
 - iii. Figure out the setting that is best for you and pursue it
 - f. You think law is boring
 - g. You don't like the adversarial nature of law
 - i. There are many areas of law that are not adversarial such as tax, trusts and estates, some government work
 - ii. Don't lump all types of practice together
 - h. You pursued a law degree because you thought you could do anything with it. Distinguish the following:
 - i. Jobs that require a law degree (practicing law and being a judge)
 - ii. Jobs where a law degree is helpful (real estate development, law school administrator, law firm administrator, managing a nonprofit)
 - iii. Jobs where a law degree is no help at all (most other jobs)
 - i. Broaden your horizons
 - i. Get some experience, like clerking for a judge or working for a public defender
 - ii. Consider the public sector – education, city attorney, county attorney
 - iii. Consider experiences where there's more creativity – public interest work
 - j. Take a year off from law school and get a job in the area that interests you

2. If you are convinced you do not want to practice law – here are examples of non-traditional careers for lawyers:
 - a. JD + volunteer fundraising = nonprofit management
 - b. JD + knowledge of insurance industry = risk management
 - c. JD + love of horses = lobbyist/legislative analyst for national equestrian association
 - d. JD + previous job as nurse = compliance officer for medical device company
 - e. JD + grassroots political experience = executive director of legislative commission; state budget director's office, legislative staff person; mayor's aid, governor's aid
 - f. JD + banking experience = bank vice president, loan review
 - g. JD + sales experience = regional sales coordinator, legal software company
 - h. JD + MBA and mediation classes = manager, employee relations, HR
3. First – Figure Out What Motivates You (See “Chapter 2 of Guerrilla Tactics”)
4. Figure Out What You Bring to the Table
 - a. Employers want to know what you can do for them
 - b. List concrete sources of your skills and knowledge including (1) educational background; (2) additional training; (3) work experience; (4) volunteer experience; (5) industry knowledge; (6) personal interests and hobbies
 - c. Identify your skills – don't tell employers what you are – tell them what you can do, e.g. Don't tell them you are a law student, then that you can do research, analyze, advocate, etc. Focus on skills.
 - d. Provide examples of your skills (“I write well,” “I wrote the orientation brochure for incoming law students at my law school,” OR “I wrote an article for a local bar association newsletter”)
5. Zero in on What You Want to Do – this means narrowing your focus by getting educated
 - a. Go to Monster and CareerBuilder and browse – see what you are drawn to
 - b. Go to a web site like www.jobhunt.org – a great resource if you have no idea what you want to do
 - c. Don't eliminate yourself based on lack of experience at this point – just get a feel for what appeals to you
 - d. Look at materials geared toward college students
 - e. Once you narrow it down, start talking to people
 - f. Contact a trade association for the industry that intrigues you, talk to someone there about careers in that industry, and ask about events you can attend and people you may talk to. Ask about conferences and seminars they hold, ask if they have a message board, job list, chat rooms focusing on the industry.
 - g. Shadow a person who does what you think you want to do
 - h. Volunteer with an organization or two in an industry that interests you
 - i. Read all of the periodicals in the field of your interest
 - j. Network with people who do the kind of work you want to do. When networking, the kinds of questions you might consider asking include:
 - i. Describe your job, your duties and responsibilities
 - ii. What do you like most about your job? What do you like least about your job?
 - iii. What are your working conditions like – hours, autonomy, flexibility?
 - iv. What legal skills do you use the most? What other “non-legal” skills do you use?
 - v. Does your employer consider your law degree valuable? How do you know?
 - vi. What about your background or skills do you think got you this job?

- vii. Is there room for advancement for a JD in your position?
- viii. Do you know of positions like yours in other industries or fields?
- ix. What others jobs do JDs hold in your company?
- x. How did you originally learn about your job? How did you find the job opening? How would I learn about openings?
- xi. Are there any classes/seminars/conferences I could attend to better position myself for a job like yours?
- xii. Is there anything you wish you had known when you started in this job?
- xiii. If I wanted to apply to your company/organization in the future, to whom would I send my resume?
- xiv. Is there anyone else I should talk to?

6. Prepare Your Tool Kit

- a. Be able to talk about your transferable skills:
 - i. You have to make crystal clear what you bring to the table – in your conversations, letters, resumes, explain why what you have is relevant to them. In order to do this, you need to become educated about the skills the industry seeks – seek out job postings, and identify the job skills needed to perform the job. Then, figure out which of your current skills/accomplishments (school, work, volunteer, hobbies) best mirror the skills needed for the job.
- b. Formulate your “Pitch Statement”
 - i. You need to be able to tell employers succinctly both why you want to do what they do (given that you are getting a law degree) and what you can do for them. You must assure the employer that you have actively chosen this career, that you are confident that you want it, that you have researched it, and that you have no intention to leave it.

7. Transferable Skills Law School Gives You

- a. Ability to analyze facts/problem solving skills
- b. Ability to work in teams or groups
- c. Ability to be a self-starter
- d. Risk awareness – awareness of risk involved in transactions, products, policies, etc.
- e. Counseling, listening skills, ability to empathize
- f. Familiarity with legal terminology
- g. Knowledge of specific complex topics (health care, insurance, tax, criminal law, corporations)
- h. Working under pressure, ability to multi-task, ability to comprehend large amounts of information
- i. Ability to think independently
- j. Ability to negotiate
- k. Ability to persuade
- l. Ability to prepare effectively
- m. Ability to speak before an audience
- n. Research skills
- o. Writing ability and ability to think and write logically

8. Popular law-related jobs

- a. Undergraduate professor or law professor
- b. Public accounting: tax and consulting (www.careers-in-accounting.com)
- c. Court administration (www.wfjc.gov) and (www.ncsconline.org)

- d. Law firm administration or consulting with law firms
- e. Bar Association administration
- f. Law school administration
- g. Law enforcement (FBI, CIA agent, hearing officer, human relations specialist, investigator)
- h. Government (see the Federal Yellow Book)
- i. Nonprofit management (www.idealists.com), the Chronicle of Philanthropy (www.philanthropy.com) and the American Society of Association Executives (www.asaecenter.org)
- j. Business: financial planning, banking, insurance, management (to name just a few)
- k. Journalism/communications
- l. Consultant
- m. Instructor in a legal assistant, paralegal or court reporter program - check out ALI-ABA (www.ali-aba.org); Institute for Continuing Legal Education (www.icle.org); Practicing Law Institute (www.pli.edu); National Institute for Trial Advocacy (www.nita.org)
- n. Legal Research and Publishing: Aspen Publishers (www.aspenpublishers.com); Commerce Clearing House (www.cch.com); Thomson/West (www.thomsoncareers.com); Matthew Bender (www.bender.com); Bureau of National Affairs (www.bna.com); LexisNexis; Westlaw
- o. Legal Search Consultant (www.nalisc.org)
- p. Healthcare/Risk Management: The American Association of Nurse Attorneys (www.taana.org); American Hospital Association (www.aha.org); American Medical Association (www.ama-assn.org); Federal, state, county, and city health agencies
- q. Trial Consultant – The American Society of Trial Consultants (www.astcweb.org)
- r. Real Estate Development – (www.realestatedeveloper.com) and The Urban Land Institute (www.uli.org)
- s. Trade Associations – Yellow Book of Associations
- t. Small businesses
- u. Start your own business