Success Strategy: Keeping the Job Search Alive During the Summer Months

by Kristen Pavón

With an entire school year behind them and final exams over, your students are no doubt ready for some rest and relaxation. However, dropping the ball on the job search during the summer break would be a mistake. Here are a few tips for your students to successfully tackle the job search over the summer.


Set the stage for a productive summer. Before diving into that glistening pool or suiting up for your first day of your internship, think about what you want to accomplish this summer in terms of your job search and professional development.

It’s tempting to let your job searching efforts die down during the summer because you’ve worked so hard for the last nine months, but by continuing your search, or even revving it up, you’ll have the advantage later.

Brainstorm, check calendars of events, then make a list and set tangible goals. For example, my summer to-do list might include (1) attend five after-hours networking happy hour events to meet other law students and local attorneys, (2) meet with three attorneys for lunch or coffee to learn about their work, (3) apply for seven jobs, (4) subscribe to two law-related newsletters or magazines, and (5) study, take and pass the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam.

My favorite online task management tool is Wunderlist. Wunderlist is a simple, free application that you can access online and download to your phone, iPad, and computer. You can create lists for different projects and add tasks to each list with completion dates and reminders.

Getting organized will help you maintain accountability for your job search efforts and stay motivated to accomplish what you’ve set out to do over the summer!

2. Keep track.

This tip is critical. I cannot emphasize enough how useful it is to keep track of your job search and professional development efforts. Good things to keep track of this summer include job applications, goal lists, networking contacts, and your completed summer work assignments.

Start a spreadsheet (or whatever organization method is right for you) to keep track of jobs you’re interested in applying for and jobs you’ve already applied for. Beyond that, you can include as much or as little information as you want. In my own job search spreadsheet, I have columns for the employer name, job title, job location, the required application materials, application deadline, contact information, the date I applied, and follow-up notes.

You can create similar spreadsheets for your goals, networking contacts, and summer work. For keeping track of networking contacts, I suggest including names, contact information, the contact’s employer, a quick sentence on how you met him or her, and follow-up notes.

Keeping track of your summer work is especially helpful when putting together application materials once the summer is over. With projects and assign-
ments fresh in your mind, I suggest jotting down case names, the organization for which you worked on the cases, the lawyers you worked with, and a quick description of the legal and factual issues you handled. This way, you’ll be able to reference this document when choosing which writing sample to send an employer or when tailoring your résumé and cover letter to a particular job opening.

3. Rework.

Résumés, cover letters, and lists of references are living documents. Don’t neglect them over the summer break. Take time to review your résumé — try out a new sleek and simple format or test a modern-yet-professional font. Also, be sure to update any experiences you may have just wrapped up (e.g., change “research, write, and draft” to “researched, wrote, and drafted”).

The same goes for cover letters. Once you’ve found a general format that you’re comfortable with, it’s easy to stick to the same script. I argue that the moment you’re comfortable with the format of your cover letters, it’s time to change things up. For example, if you normally end your cover letter by leaving the ball in the employer’s court with something like, “thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon,” maybe it’s time to try, “thank you for your consideration, I will contact you within two weeks to follow up on my application.”

Finally, over the summer, reach out to your references to make sure their contact information hasn’t changed. Use this as an opportunity to check in with them and maybe even meet with them for coffee or lunch if they’re local (you’ll be able to cross it off of your summer goal list!).

4. Give back.

In addition to developing a relationship with your own mentor this summer, try mentoring someone yourself. This will allow you to do three important things: (1) provide valuable guidance to someone who may be interested in law school or public interest law, (2) develop your mentoring style and skills, and (3) reinvigorate your own passion for public interest law. To find a mentee, reach out to your undergraduate institution’s pre-law counselors and let them know you’re available to chat with students.

5. Learn.

During the fall and spring semesters, you learned about the law and developed practical legal skills. Supplement your education this summer by honing non-legal skills that are also crucial to lawyering.

Many community colleges offer affordable, work schedule-friendly community education classes over the summer. Useful classes to take include public speaking, financial management, business skills, marketing, nonprofit management, or any foreign language.

Additionally, take advantage of free or low-cost educational events in your area or online, such as webinars, bar association lectures, or law school summer events.

6. Recharge.

You’ve spent at least nine long months reading, briefing, breathing, and living case law. You deserve a break. Make sure to find time to relax and do what you enjoy.

If you’ll be interning or working in a big city this summer, check out PSLawNet’s Having Fun on the Cheap page at www.pslawnet.org/havingfunonthecheapinbigcities for suggestions. To add a few books to your summer leisure reading queue, go to PSLawNet’s Summer 2012 Reading List at www.pslawnet.org/summerreadinglist.

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