

Around the Water Cooler

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Timing was everything in law school graduate's job search

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As the director of the Office of Professionalism & Engagement, I meet regularly with students to get their input as to how The John Marshall Law School can improve our delivery of services. Most recently, the top concern expressed in those student meetings, particularly by 3Ls, is the need for assistance in their job search. To that end, the Job Placement Initiative was created – with very positive results. In my last blog, we checked in with recent law school graduate Joe Kearney on the advantages of pipelining in finding a job. In this column, we hear from another recent graduate on how timing can be everything in a job search.

An Interview with Alex Stamatoglou, judicial law clerk for Charles P. Kocoras

Frossard: Alex, you are currently clerking for the Honorable Charles P. Kocoras, U. S. District Court for the

Northern District of Illinois. We met in the spring of 2011 when you were looking for career advice. You told me your “dream job” was to become a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, but you thought you would begin with a clerkship for a federal judge. I recall that you were “pipelining” at the time we met by interning for a federal judge. However, that particular federal judge was not hiring. At that point, what did I suggest that you do?

Stamatoglou: You encouraged me to focus my efforts on meeting established professionals who were well-positioned to help me. As I realized during our chat, there is no substitute for having respected professionals vouch for you. You then mentioned that you were planning on meeting Judge Kocoras for lunch in the next week, and offered to pass my resume along to him. A week later you emailed me to let me know that Judge Kocoras wanted to meet with me. I called his chambers that day to set up a meeting.

Frossard: What was the result of that meeting?

Stamatoglou: Judge Kocoras and I spoke for over an hour. We discovered that we had a lot in common – roots on the South Side of Chicago, a common Greek heritage. And we're both ardent baseball fans. Then we discussed my career plans and goals.

Frossard: Did you get hired?

Stamatoglou: Not right away, but toward the end of our meeting Judge Kocoras asked if I wished to be considered for a clerkship with him. I said that I would.

Frossard: What did I suggest?

Stamatoglou: You suggested that I keep in contact with the judge. I mailed Judge Kocoras a note thanking him for his time and his

advice, and planned to reach out to him in a couple weeks.

Frossard: What happened next?

Stamatoglou: Like they say, “timing is everything.” The very next week Judge Kocoras called me and informed me that he had a clerkship position available starting in April of 2012, and offered me a one-year clerkship. I was ecstatic.

Frossard: In terms of your present job, what professionalism skills are required?

Stamatoglou: As a clerk, I am always aware that my words and actions reflect on the court. In that vein, I must always act respectfully and courteously with litigants, attorneys, and court personnel. It is also important that I ably and efficiently perform my work duties.

Frossard: How did John Marshall prepare you for that job? Any surprises?

Stamatoglou: The John Marshall Law School prepared me very well for my career. I obtained two externships through John Marshall's externship program, which enabled me to learn how to be a professional by working with competent and respected attorneys. John Marshall has also been instrumental in helping me meet and learn from alumni through its various mentorship programs. Finally, Professor Bernabe's Professional Responsibility class highlighted the duties that competent and professional attorneys must abide by, and prepared us by presenting a multitude of potential issues that attorneys often grapple with.

Frossard: Any advice you can give recent graduates challenged by the current job market?

Stamatoglou:

1) Do well in school. For most of

us, this means long hours with our noses buried in textbooks. While this requires a tremendous amount of sacrifice, potential employers regard your grades as the best indicator of your competence.

2) Put yourself out there. Regardless of how you do in school, establishing and maintaining relationships with successful and respected professionals is an effective way to learn of new job opportunities and to stand out from your fellow job applicants. It can never hurt to have people vouch for you.

3) Your reputation matters, even in law school. Maturity and competence are attributes that employers highly value. How you present yourself to your colleagues, professors and employers tells potential employers what kind of employee you might be.

4) Don't give up! The job search can get pretty discouraging, and the depressed legal job market is a fact of life. Jobs are still out there; we just have to work harder to get them. This means more time in the classroom and library and more time spent harnessing our relationships for opportunities. But, it is imperative to never stop trying.

Frossard: When I asked Judge Kocoras if he had anything he would like to share with John Marshall students who may be interested in a clerkship, he left me with these words of wisdom:

“It is important to be persistent in your quest; things that are not available at some point may later open up. Employers value those they deem to be go-getters.”

To view previous blogs by Frossard, go to professionalism.jmls.edu. Her next blog for Around the Water Cooler will be the third in a series of conversations with recent law school graduates, featuring a young lawyer who personifies the phrase, “if at first you don't succeed, try, try again!”