Does the law suit really suit you?

Noble yet competitive, the legal profession is one of the most prestigious and highly rewarding careers of our times. Recruiters are constantly on the lookout of candidates with strong academic credentials and those who can display a hunger for success, global thinking, ability to work in a team and adhere to the ethics of the field. Do you fit the bill?

Okay! So you’ve earned yourself the black coat and the right to be called a law soldier. In short, you’ve got your law degree and are now looking for that ideal job. But what is it that will make you get noticed by the best in the business and gain you entry into the haloed foyers of famous law firms?

In the legal industry, the sweetest fruits are reserved for those who are academically outstanding. Earning your degree from a top law school, with good grades, automatically enhances your chances of getting selected. "The core points remain obtaining your degree from a strong school and performing well in your class," says Danice Kowalczyk, Esq., Co-Managing Partner of North America for Laurence Simons International, a specialist international legal recruitment consultancy.

But that’s not enough! You also require the right attitude to court success in this profession. This would mean that any candidate who wishes to catch the eye of the recruiters should impress them not just with his knowledge, but also with his personality. Tenacity, dedication, perseverance, presence of mind, confidence and willingness to work as a team are just some of the many pre-requisites. "Legal recruiters generally look for candidates with good academic performance, those who possess confidence and presentation, the ability to work with others, and perhaps a certain hunger for success," says Professor Tan Cheng Han, Dean, Faculty of Law, National University of Singapore (NUS). Aspirants must also be forward-thinking, be aware of the current trends in the legal sector, be able to take quick decisions and calculated risks.

Being a self-starter helps especially when it is expected of you to grasp any situation quickly. "Employers (and their clients) want lawyers who…can hit the ground running. Said differently, you should inspire confidence in the people around you," says Carey Bertolet, Esq., Co-Managing partner of North America for Laurence Simons International. She adds that being proactive and competent is necessary but so is the understanding of the business aspect of the legal world. "Think with a legal and business mind during the interview, which is designed to show the employer that you can add immediate value not just on a legal scale but also on a business scale," Bertolet says, adding that setting forth of competence and a creative legal mind with a true understanding of the employer’s business will get you a job.

Getting the grip of the business aspect of the legal industry is, in fact, extremely essential to be a winner in the field. "The most successful lawyers are those who, at their root, are consummate problem solvers. They are instinctively able to grasp the commercial considerations of their clients and also have a good understanding of the law, thereby enhancing their ability to find the right legal or commercial solutions to the issues their clients face," says Prof Tan from NUS. Kowalczyk seconds his views and observes, "A good lawyer should have an ownership attitude, should think of the law firm as a business and should contribute to that business instead of simply asking ‘What’s in it for me?’"

Another major factor which candidates in the legal industry must embrace is globalization. Demand as well as ambition is spurring law firms to open offices offshore—dotting not just countries, but several continents. The challenges and opportunities posed by globalization have thus led to an amplified preference for candidates with a global outlook and local knowledge. Aspirants with confidence to handle clients from across the world are as much sought-after by recruiters as those who are willing to relocate without difficulty. "Lawyers who are open to relocation...often open up a range of exciting opportunities for themselves which other candidates would miss," says Kowalczyk. "While movement for work may be preferred by recruiters, they favour candidates who can assure them of loyalty, dedication, consistency, reliability and a long-term commitment. In an age where law firms are constantly competing against each other for clients and reputation is what matters, those who intend to switch from one firm to another will eventually lose favour of both the sides.

To boost your career prospects abroad, a master’s degree in law can come handy. "A Masters of Law or LLM may be useful for credentialing if one is not from a well-known law school. LLMs from a common law jurisdiction may also be helpful for lawyers from non-common law jurisdictions and/or where English is not the first language as it is a means of gaining exposure to the common law and improving English language skills," says Prof Tan.

Last but not least, aspirants in the field of law must stick to the professional code of conduct and remain faithful to the ethical and professional standards.

If you can win your case in the court of the recruiter’s office, it can be a beginning of a successful career which may last ad infinitum.

By Kanika Tandon

law