

## **From Law School to Practice: Lessons Learned in the First Year - with Hassan A. Niazi and Guest Contributions by Advocates Waiza Rafique, Salman Ahmad Maan and Nida Usman Chaudhary.**

### **Thematic Questions**

- 1. What are the advantages and limitations of a post-graduate degree in law?**
- 2. What aspects can a lawyer consider when choosing the right law firm to start their career?**
- 3. Describe the business side of the law and how clientele is built**
- 4. How competitive are lawyers from Pakistan globally? How can they build their experience for jobs abroad?**

### **What are the advantages and limitations of pursuing post-graduation in law?**

#### *Recommendations*

- Not recommended to pursue post-grad immediately after LL.B.
- At least 2 years of practice is necessary to understand the area of interest and gain clarity.
- Experience is valuable for an exceptional post-grad application and attaining scholarships.
- Practice helps in better understanding the law and molding academic paths accordingly.
- Exposes to different areas of law and refines thinking abilities.
- An excellent option for enhancing abilities in the long run if resources are available.
- In case of pursuing post-grad right after LL.B, gain work experience through internships and associateship during undergraduate, for exposure.

#### *Limitations*

- Not a substitute for years of experience in understanding the law and practice.
- The client views the success of a lawyer in terms of professionalism and commitment, not just the university or degree.
- Obtaining a post-graduate will not necessarily enhance legal business in terms of more clients.
- Gather information from various sources regarding the field of study before pursuing post-graduation.

### **What aspects can a lawyer consider when choosing the right law firm to start their career?**

- I. *Biases* - The problem of biases in the country's system affects the choice of law firms where individuals from small cities face more issues than those from metropolitan cities.

- II. *Good Mentor* - Looking for a good mentor or supervisor is essential who is available to invest their time and effort in the mentees rather than looking just at the prestige of the firm.
- III. *Diversity and portfolio*- Working in firms that offer diversity is important for making informed decisions about areas of specialization which later builds onto the portfolio.
- IV. *Appearances in courts*- If interested in pursuing a career in litigation, join a firm that takes you to court to be part of all stages of litigation including filing, arguments etc.
- V. *Presence in client meetings*- If interested in corporate law, join a firm that allows you to be present in client meetings to understand how deals are structured and negotiated and how clients are handled.
- VI. *Work credit*- Ask for credit for work duly done, through recognition as junior counsels in judgements, appraisals etc
- VII. *Pay structure*- It is imperative to discuss pay structure or other essential information during the interview stage, particularly in terms of progression policy and routes.
- VIII. *Pro Bono work*- Take time out for social causes or pro bono work along with the work at the firm to gain experience on your own and argue cases on merit.

## What is the business side of the law and how to build a clientele?

### A. *Young lawyers often overlook the importance of obtaining clients while they are busy refining their legal skills*

The legal profession has a business aspect that young lawyers often neglect while they focus on honing their legal skills. However, building a clientele is essential for success in the legal profession.

### B. *Building a clientele is highly dependent on the lawyers' reputation*

Young lawyers need to start building their clientele from a basic level. Clients need to know them in a professional capacity to ensure positive word of mouth and increase their clientele. Building a positive reputation around the idea that they can get the job done is essential to obtain clients.

### C. *For individuals who move towards PIL when they have a dearth of case files,*

It is essential to ensure that writ has substance to ensure positive perceptions and reputation. Young lawyers must understand that their reputation and the perception of their services matter, as they are selling a service, and client referrals are crucial for success. Avoid filing writs for frivolous matters. Use this option sparingly.

## How competitive are lawyers from Pakistan globally? How can they build their experience for jobs abroad?

- *Challenges*- Lawyers from Pakistan face challenges in finding jobs abroad due to limitations with a Pakistani passport, as it makes it difficult to obtain sponsorship for work visas.
- *Experience*- To build experience for jobs abroad, lawyers should aim to gain experience in their current role, building a versatile portfolio of skills that can easily be transferred to a new job.

- **Skillset-** Employers abroad are more interested in a lawyer's skill set rather than the number of interesting cases they have worked on. The lawyers need to pitch the skills they have learned over the span of their work experience that can easily be transferred into a new job.
- **Versatile portfolio-** Lawyers should have a versatile portfolio of skills, including litigation, advice-giving, opinion formulation, and knowledge beyond the law, especially for the industry they are applying to.
- **Resume building-** A well-crafted CV tailored to specific role is crucial for job applications abroad, which should be free of typos or formatting errors and contain accurate information. Students should use online resources to build their CVs and when applying for jobs every CV should be tailored to each specific job.
- **Interviews-** Lawyers should also work on their interview skills, being able to answer difficult and psychologically challenging questions confidently and in the spur of the moment.
- **Postgraduate-** Pursuing postgraduate studies abroad can be a good way to enter the foreign job market, as it can help build a network in the country of study, and the experience gained during postgrad studies can be leveraged for job applications abroad. This is where a postgraduate degree can actually be useful.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### How to look for a good mentor?

- **Hit-and-try-** One way to find a good mentor is to start working at a law firm and gain experience. This approach involves trial and error, where you can gauge for yourself if you are learning from your supervisor or mentor. You can observe how they work, how they communicate, and how they handle cases.
- **Network with teachers and seniors-** Another way to look for a good mentor is to talk to your teachers and seniors in law school. They may have connections or may know someone who can guide you in your career. You can make a shortlist of potential mentors and pursue them based on their experience, expertise, and reputation.
- **Investigate-** It's essential to research and gather information on potential mentors to assess their skills, experience, and approach to mentoring.
- **Look beyond the prestige:-** A good mentor should be someone who is willing to invest time in you and is available to provide guidance and feedback. They should be approachable, supportive, and able to provide honest and constructive feedback.

### How can you work towards scholarships abroad?

- Research is key when it comes to working towards scholarships abroad.
- Look at the criteria, procedures, and requirements of scholarships.
- Thoroughly research scholarships that you are interested in.
- Don't make the misconception that work experience should only be post-qualification.
- Internships or volunteer experience during your qualification counts as work experience, which can help you qualify for certain scholarships such as the Chevening scholarship.

*"In my experience, I had 2 years post qualification experience because I thought that if I look at the practice in Pakistan and its groundwork realities, it will assist me in drafting my application and gaining material for it."*

- Advocate Waiza Rafique

*“Skills are essential. When I was in London, I had worked for a little while with a solicitors' law firm. The hiring used to be based on skills”*

– Advocate Waiza Rafique

## **What are the differences in opportunities in the future for lawyers who either did the local law or the external law?**

- Discrimination may exist in the job market towards certain universities or titles, regardless of whether the degree is local or external. This can be a disadvantage for some lawyers, regardless of their qualifications.
- Individuals with an external law degree may have an advantage in terms of exposure to different legal systems and cultures. They may have a broader perspective and a more global outlook, which can be useful in certain types of legal work.
- Local law degrees may offer advantages such as familiarity with the local legal system, connections with local legal professionals, and a better understanding of local customs and culture.
- Ultimately, the value of a law degree depends on various factors, including the quality of education, practical experience, personal qualities, and the job market. Both local and external degrees can provide opportunities for success in the legal profession, but it is up to the individual to make the most of their education and opportunities.

## **What advice can you give a 1st-year law student?**

- Staying updated with the legal side of things in Pakistan by reading legal news articles and listening to the lawyers on TV. This helps in building legal knowledge and staying informed about the current affairs of the legal profession in the country.
- Make an effort to understand the court procedures by visiting courts at any stage. Courts are public places and no one will stop you from sitting in the courtroom to observe the proceedings. This will help you understand how the legal system works in practice and give you a better understanding of the procedures and protocols involved.
- Internships are an excellent way to gain practical experience in the legal profession. Look for internships with law firms, NGOs, or other legal organizations to get hands-on experience working in the field. A good mentor who is willing to teach you is key to making the most out of your internship experience.
- Take advantage of the resources available to you in law school, such as career counseling services, libraries, and connecting with your seniors and teachers. These resources can help you build your skills, network with legal professionals, and prepare for your career after graduation.
- Work hard to develop a strong academic record. Good grades and a solid understanding of legal principles will help you stand out to potential employers and increase your chances of success in the legal profession.

## **Does the legal system in Pakistan take precedence over the English legal system?**

- Pakistani law is not entirely modeled on the British legal system, although it still has some similarities. Pakistan is a common law system, which means that laws are developed through the precedents set by courts over time.
- Despite some similarities, Pakistani law is now fundamentally different from the British legal system. For example, the civil and criminal procedures used in Pakistan date back to the colonial period and are quite different from those used in contemporary British law.

- England has an unwritten constitution, which means that the parliament is supreme. In contrast, Pakistan has a written constitution that is modeled more on federal constitutions like those of the United States or Australia.
- The goal of legal education is to train students to think like lawyers and answer complex questions. While civil and criminal procedures are important, they can be learned later if not already taught in law school.
  - In Pakistan, civil advocacy often hinges on interim injunctions or stay appeals. These legal strategies involve asking the court to temporarily halt some action while a case is ongoing. This can be a powerful tool in civil cases.
  - Criminal advocacy in Pakistan often involves bail applications. These applications ask the court to release a defendant from jail while their case is ongoing. The decision to grant bail can be crucial for the outcome of a case.

### **Is a JD a good idea after an LLB in order to practice in the US or only a master's in common law to practice in the US?**

- A JD (Juris Doctor) is a professional degree that is required to practice law in the United States, and it is highly valued by employers in the US legal industry.
- If you have completed an LLB (Bachelor of Laws) from a non-US country, you can still practice law in the US, but you would need to complete additional requirements, such as a master's in common law or a JD, depending on the state's regulations.
- However, if you have completed your LLB from a reputable university in England, and then go on to pursue a master's in common law from a good university in the US, you may still have good job prospects in the US legal industry.
- Whether you pursue a JD or a master's in common law, passing the bar exam is essential to becoming licensed to practice law in the US.

### **Do law firms prefer foreign degree graduates over local graduates? How can they try to overcome this dichotomy?**

*“The bar council in Pakistan only recognize LLB degrees and not the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL) to grant licenses. It is important for law graduates to check the bar requirements before proceeding with their legal education, whether local or foreign.”*

**- Advocate Nida Usman Chaudhary**

- The practical skills and experience gained by a law graduate through hard work matter more than just obtaining a degree from a foreign university.
- Law firms look for practical skills and experience in their employees, and a foreign degree may not always guarantee that.
- To overcome this dichotomy, local law graduates should focus on gaining practical skills and experience, such as through internships, moot court competitions, or volunteering, which can make them more attractive to potential employers.
- Networking is also essential for law graduates to create opportunities for themselves and establish relationships with potential employers.

- Secondly, if you have gone abroad and just obtained a degree with no improvement in your opinions or a learned new skill set, you are in no way better than the person who does a local law degree and through their hard work, obtained practical skills.

## **How can work-life balance be accommodated in advancing through your career as a lawyer?**

- Work-life balance is essential for lawyers to avoid burnout, which can negatively impact their work performance and mental health. It is important to prioritize personal time and set boundaries with work to achieve a healthy balance.
- The options of tutoring, lecturing, and working in a law firm are there for individuals who are unable to make ends meet and it is a necessity for them to work in these domains simultaneously to have a supplemental income.
- It is crucial to prioritize mental health and seek professional help if necessary because your work performance like litigation skills will automatically suffer.

## **Is the field of law a career in the freelancing market?**

- While law firms provide a structured environment for lawyers to work in, it is possible to have a career in law as a freelancer i.e. opening up your own practice.
- To succeed as a freelancer, it is important to focus on the business side of things, including building a reputation as a trustworthy and reliable lawyer.
- One way to build a reputation is to establish yourself as an expert in a particular field of law or to specialize in a specific type of case. This will help you become known as the go-to lawyer for those types of cases.
- Another important factor is to maintain a professional demeanor at all times. This includes being honest and transparent with clients, as well as following all legal procedures and avoiding shortcuts or unethical practices.
- Networking is also important, as it helps you to build relationships with potential clients and other professionals in the legal field.

*" It is essential that you develop a professional reputation that appears serious in your profession. This is achieved through your work, which should be done with perfection and capability.*

- *The foremost thing that clients need to know is that the lawyer will remain in the field and not shut down their practice before their cases reach an outcome.*
- *Always keep your commercial hat on and showcase your legal skills whenever there is an opportunity related to the law.*
- *Keep an engaging attitude and promptly respond to your clients.*
- *Provide quality services at a reasonable fee.*
- *When starting your practice, keep your expectations realistic.*
- *Begin with small steps in order to build a sustainable practice in the initial years."*

**-Advocate Salman Ahmad Maan**

## Conclusion

Lawyers should keep their focus on professionalism and quality. If you have a reputation for being professional and doing quality work, your career will automatically advance. One final piece of advice is that everyone has their own trajectory, and you should not compare yourself to others because everyone has their own pace. When referring to quality, whether it is a case for civil court, criminal court, advice for in-house counsel, transactions, or a supreme court case, every case should be prepared with the same quality, which should never be compromised upon.

This brief is based on the twitter space conducted by Lahore Education and Research Network on 31 March 2023 with Advocate Hassan A. Niazi. The speakers who contributed in the space and shared their experiences included:

- 1) Advocate Hassan A. Niazi
- 2) Advocate Waiza Rafique
- 3) Advocate Salman Ahmad Maan
- 4) Advocate Nida Usman Chaudhary

The recording of the space can be accessed here: [https://twitter.com/info\\_learnpak/status/1641817520230354944?s=20\\_\(starts after 1 minute 40 seconds\)](https://twitter.com/info_learnpak/status/1641817520230354944?s=20_(starts after 1 minute 40 seconds)).