

# Developing your career plan

A Badenoch & Clark guide

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Unless you are confident that you'll be happy doing the same type of assignments for the rest of your working life, you'll need to set yourself an ultimate goal and a plan of which route you'd like to take to achieve that goal. Is your next caseload a stepping stone to even bigger and better things? What skills do you need to hone for your next role? What are firms looking for from lawyers and how do you match up?

No matter what the economic climate, if you're ambitious, you'll need to have a good idea of the routes you may take and how to make the journey easier.

This guide highlights the top ten things you'll need to consider when developing your career.

## 1 See your career as a journey

Having a clear idea of where you want to get to is the best start. It's this vision that will keep you energised in the good times and focused in between assignments. It's your clarity of purpose that will make the difference between getting to where you want to be or ending up blown off course and somewhere else. It is most likely that you'll need several roles to reach your goal so work out some milestones – they might be skills based, salary based or responsibility based. One thing for certain is they really shouldn't be job titles.

Your career is something you should build continuously rather than treat it as an endless string of roles you move onto. It's about increasing your knowledge and building up the right skills and experiences that are valued by employers. Keep an open mind on the precise route you take to get to where you want to be – there's almost certainly more than one way to get there. If you are focused on your end goal, you'll pick up development opportunities as you go. The more you add to your skills and experience along the way, the more routes you'll open to get there.

## 2 Identify what motivates you

There are plenty of reasons why someone may look to move on from a role, from outgrowing it and wanting a greater challenge to craving new experiences or a different leadership style. And while most things can be addressed with the support of your manager, work

feels less like work the more you enjoy it. In deciding where you want to be, make sure it's somewhere that will hold your interest for the duration of the assignment, suits your preferred lifestyle and uses your skills to the fullest. The things we are good at are often the things we enjoy most. This is a good place to start, especially as personal development will ensure you don't limit your ambitions. What do you like about your existing role? What topics do you get passionate about? What projects get you excited? By courting the sectors, specialisms and cultures you're most likely to thrive in, the more likely you are to develop a genuine, unwavering and continued commitment to your career path and become a rising star of your profession.

## 3 Identify which competencies are needed to progress

Once you've established what interests and motivates you, the next step is to ensure your skills and competencies match your chosen career path. You will need to fully identify (and understand) what competencies are required in order for you to move onto the next level, and furthermore, succeed at that level. Does your ultimate role need analytical reasoning, commercial awareness, or does it rely more on strong communication skills and leadership qualities? Some of these you may already be very strong at. However, where you're not, now is the time to start focusing on improving these areas. The more you begin to recognise where your strengths lie



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Hugh Berry, professional locum solicitor

competency-wise, and where you need to improve, the more attainable that career path becomes.

#### 4 Are qualifications or experience more valuable?

Some roles do require specific qualifications, but whilst employers are attracted to well-qualified candidates, they are even more attracted to those who demonstrate a commitment to being experts in their field. For many professionals, the qualification is the starting block, the rite of passage. It gets you through the door. Alone, the letters after your name will not be enough to guarantee your future career. It's your hands-on experience and exposure to specific types of work that builds your career prospects. Being skilful in what you do and having a demonstrable track record is the most important quality. Andrew Belmont, solicitor, advises: "Even if you do not have as much experience as you would like there are a number of ways of improving your marketability. What your employer really wants is somebody who can do the job. Buy yourself an up to date practice area text book. Spend a few hours each day studying and do not worry that you will not be able to remember everything because you'll remember where to look up any point about which you are unsure. Read the trade press each week because this will update you on any current or imminent changes in law."

#### 5 Did it happen for them?

At interview, firms will be selling their credentials to you just as much as you to them. Promises are easily made, but you'll want them to be rooted in reality. So be sure to ask for real life examples of where and how they've supported their staff. This will give you a measure of feasibility for your role. Next, what development opportunities were given to the previous incumbent? This will tell you what to expect yourself. Compare everything you've learnt about your prospective employer's commitment to providing compelling cases, with your own career goals. If these don't tally, you may need to adjust your expectations or seek out an alternative firm. If it's good news, you'll want to agree a project development plan with your new boss in due course.

#### 6 Put your plan in context of the market

While you may already have mapped out in detail your career path, market conditions will always play a hand in how quickly and to what extent you can achieve your plan. While a clear focus and drive is essential, you need to be realistic and put your aspirations into the context of the current market. The number of openings and opportunities are naturally varied in nature during a downturn. Likewise, the skills and competencies that firms demand may also impact on levels of demand in a buoyant economy. Bear in mind that market conditions are constantly changing, and consequently your expectations may need to fluctuate with the times. If you can remain flexible and open-minded, then your chances of fulfilling your longer-term plans are more likely to come to fruition.

#### 7 Consider all your options

Continuously scan your environment for development opportunities. Keeping your end goal in mind makes it easier to spot exciting opportunities that come your way both inside the firm and externally within your own personal network. Knowing your options helps you to stay positive and focussed. There's plenty to keep a look out for too – secondments, special projects, mentoring, coaching, having a great role model, work shadowing, technical training, soft skills training, conferences, seminars and networking events. Exhaust all these options as you look for your next assignment. Andrew Belmont recommends that: "If you have any friends or contacts that are running their own firm, offer to work on a voluntary basis. This will not only have the advantage of keeping you sharp but it is also likely to impress any potential employer with your commitment. When asked what you've been doing recently, you'll be able to outline that you have been working on a voluntary basis rather than say that you have been doing nothing."

#### 8 How mobile do you need to be to reach your goal?

As globalisation continues apace, international exposure will only become more desirable. Your progression as a lawyer may

require you to develop an appreciation of different markets, either domestically or worldwide. If international exposure is your ticket to become a fully rounded lawyer, how far, frequently and for how long are you prepared to travel? If travel, secondments or relocation don't fit in with your lifestyle or circumstances, investigate your options. Speak to your contacts about how that exposure might be gained in another way; consider what other routes you could take to reach your ultimate goal. If mobility does appeal to you, find out what it'll take to be granted envoy status. Hugh Berry, professional locum solicitor, has not been affected at all by the rescission and, of late, has been continuously employed in back-to-back locum assignments: "If I hadn't been prepared to travel widely and stay away over night around the UK for various assignments, I would not have secured the number of roles that I have over the past four years. If you are not prepared to move around temporarily, you will struggle in securing positions in this current climate. As a general rule, I believe a professional locum needs to be flexible regarding locations of work."

## 9 Know what employers want to see first

In order for you to progress, you need to be aware of what it's going to take to meet and exceed your firm's expectations. Part of achieving your objectives and long-term plans will come from understanding your firm's expectations of you. If you want to succeed, it helps to

have the support of your firm. They may have concerns or areas for improvement that you have not considered yet. There may also be other firm-wide or departmental issues that you are not aware of which could impact upon your role. Talk to them about your aspirations and plans, so that they can give you a fair assessment of what you need to do in order to achieve them – and what opportunities may be on offer either now or in the future. The more honest feedback you can receive, as well as advice and guidance, the more likely you are to succeed on your path.

## 10 Review your plans and chart your progress

Do make sure that the goals you set and the milestones you noted at the beginning are not forgotten. Write them down somewhere and refer to them frequently. No performance review, appraisal, or career conversation should go by without direct reference to your career plan. By being aware of where you are going and the timescales you set yourself, you'll know whether you're making the appropriate progress. And remember that there's more than one route to get to where you're going. Take stock to see if you've changed direction and reset your course accordingly. This way, you'll take advantage of the development opportunities that come along and be able to direct the conversations you have with clients to plan for an immediate future that achieves both of your objectives.

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If you would like to get involved in any of these we'd be delighted to hear from you. Contact us at [connections@badenochandclark.com](mailto:connections@badenochandclark.com)

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