

MAKING IT TO 3L

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The beginning of law school was more like a foreign language lesson rather than a lesson in the law. The assigned cases were in Old English and took what seemed like forever to brief. Words like *dicta*, *de novo*, and *sua sponte* floated through the lectures along with other terms of art. I needed a dictionary to understand those first few lectures. By the time I got a handle on that first semester, it was time to confront the stress of taking an exam that accounted for the entire grade in the course. Talk about pressure.

Despite the choppy start to law school, two things became clear to me by the end of my first year: (1) I could be successful in law school, and (2) some of my classmates were going to be lifelong friends. However, I still felt like I was missing something at the end of my first year -- Oh, the confidence that I could actually be a lawyer. That would change over the next two semesters.

At the beginning of my second year, I obtained an internship at a biotech company assisting general counsel with patent infringement claims. I performed research to find evidence of infringement of the company's patents. Initially, the internship consisted of research and writing various memoranda and motions. This connected legal writing in law school to the real world, but it still felt very academic. Then, about halfway through the semester, the attorney sat down with me and requested my opinion about a particular case strategy he was working on. This took me by surprise and I quickly got nervous and worried that I would say something wrong and sound ignorant. In my mind, counseling is a big part of being a lawyer and I did not want to get it wrong. I jumped right in, though, and to my surprise, was able to discuss competently the pros and cons of the stated strategy. From that point, confidence started to build that I could actually be a lawyer.

[Practice note from Editors: This example demonstrates the importance of positive mentoring.]

In the second semester of 2L, I interned for a federal magistrate judge. I took notes for the judge in early neutral evaluation, case management, and settlement conferences for a variety of cases. I also sat in on



many criminal proceedings. I worked in chambers about thirty hours a week and this allowed me to observe many attorneys and to interact with the judge on a regular basis. I still remember how nervous I was in those first few interactions with the judge. I was not sure what to say and how to say it when speaking to him. That nervousness eventually subsided and I became comfortable speaking to and in front of the judge. This ease, along with my previous experience gave me the full confidence that I could be a lawyer. I had the confidence that I could counsel and appear before a judge.

There is a well-known mantra in law school: the first year they scare you to death, the second year they work you to death, and the third year they bore you to death. I think that it really is more like your first year is when you realize whether you can succeed in law school, your second year is when you gain the confidence that you can be a lawyer, and your third year, you are just anxious to get out there and be a lawyer.

I stand today at the third stage: Just anxious to get out there and be the lawyer I now know I can be.

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