

HOW TO 'LEAN IN' AFTER ARTICLES
BY: LAWYER COACH PAULETTE

It's hireback season. Every year around this time, articling students go into panic mode. It's understandable. The transition from articles to the practice of law can be overwhelming, particularly for those not hired back.

As a professional coach and lawyer, I know what strategies can help you 'lean in' to your next job. With a little help from Sheryl Sandberg, I am going to share some of these strategies with you by expounding on a few quotes from her book, *Lean In*.¹

"PREPARATION IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT WHEN LOOKING FOR A JOB."²

- ✓ Make a list of all the work you did in your articles and identify which skills were utilized in each situation
- ✓ This list will help you update your résumé; add a deal or litigation list to your résumé as an appendix
- ✓ Tailor your résumé and cover letter for each job
- ✓ There are plenty of résumé/cover letter writing resources out there; I like the Ontario Public Sector's (even for private sector applications): <https://www.gojobs.gov.on.ca/docs/OPS%20Cover%20Letter%20and%20Resume%20Writing%20Guide.pdf>

"COMMUNICATION WORKS BEST WHEN WE COMBINE APPROPRIATENESS WITH AUTHENTICITY."³

- ✓ If hireback decisions have been announced, then now is the time to start asking for help in your workplace
- ✓ Walk around, and let people know to keep you top of mind for whatever opportunities you are looking for (and give them your personal e-mail address so they can keep in touch with you)
- ✓ Get reference letters (or phone numbers for people who can act as a verbal reference - sometimes it's hard to get a reference letter and sometimes potential employers prefer to speak to referees)
- ✓ Since many employers want to see how well you write, ask permission to take writing samples with you
- ✓ Engage the services of the student coordinator (if your employer has one) i.e. ask him/her for feedback on your résumé, ask for interview tips

¹ (2013: Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House of Canada Limited, Toronto). Sheryl Sandberg sent shockwaves into the working world with this controversial book. It challenges women, and men, to change the conversation from "what women can't do" to "what women CAN do".

² Page 69.

³ Page 78.

“FEEDBACK IS AN OPINION, GROUNDED IN OBSERVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES, WHICH ALLOWS US TO KNOW WHAT IMPRESSION WE MAKE ON OTHERS.”⁴

- ✓ Ask for feedback from the lawyers/partners you worked for
- ✓ Ask questions like, “How can I do better?”, “What am I doing that I don’t know?”, “What am I *not* doing that I don’t see?”⁵
- ✓ The above questions are designed for you to gain the greatest learning opportunity
- ✓ Focus on the message, not on the delivery of the feedback
- ✓ Too often, we become defensive because of the “way” someone says something, and miss out on a chance that truly benefits us
- ✓ Liken the feedback to clay, and mold yourself into the lawyer you want to become

“WHAT I NOTICED OVER THE YEARS WAS THAT FOR THE MOST PART, THE MEN REACHED FOR OPPORTUNITIES MUCH MORE QUICKLY THAN THE WOMEN... MEN WERE ALSO MORE LIKELY TO CHASE A GROWTH OPPORTUNITY EVEN BEFORE A NEW OPENING WAS ANNOUNCED.”⁶

- ✓ This one can be a tough pill to swallow
- ✓ Start by congratulating yourself on coming this far
- ✓ Next, take stock of all that you’ve learned in the past 10 months
- ✓ Ask yourself what you were really good at and what you really liked, then think about how you can build on those experiences and stretch yourself
- ✓ Even if you had a horrible articling experience, ask yourself what you really needed instead and build from there
- ✓ With this level of clarity, you will feel more confident seeking out new opportunities and meeting people who can help get you to the next level

“YOU HAVE TO TAKE OPPORTUNITIES AND MAKE AN OPPORTUNITY FIT FOR YOU, RATHER THAN THE OTHER WAY AROUND.”⁷

- ✓ Re-assess your job search efforts along the way and take corrective measures when necessary
- ✓ Having a job is sometimes better than not having one at all
- ✓ Your attitude will likely dictate the potential for learning in a less-than-ideal job; consider the potential for growth within the organization and/or as a lawyer
- ✓ Focus on building skills: I often refer articling students to the entry-level competencies the LSUC expects of them to identify areas they can further develop (<http://www.lsuc.on.ca/LicensingExaminations/>)

All the best on your next steps! And remember, you are not alone.

Paulette Pommells helps articling students transition from the study of law to the practice of law. For more information, please visit Paulette’s website at www.paulettepommells.com or contact her at paulette@paulettepommells.com.

⁴ Page 83.

⁵ Page 83.

⁶ Page 34.

⁷ Page 35.