

Hard-Nosed Advice from a Cranky Law Professor

How to Succeed in Law School

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for Leslie, Natalie, and Amelie
AP

for my Papa Joe
CK

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Introduction

The idea of approaching law school in a traditional manner is out of vogue. No one right way exists, or so we are told, on how to learn. Students have many different perspectives, depending on their cultural and economic background, as well as where, when, and in what order they were born. Students are often advised that the path to success changes depending on whether they are a Baby Boomer, a Tweener, a Gen Xer, or a Gen Yer. For many then, the way to achieve success in law school is a personal thing. Students are encouraged to do whatever they feel most comfortable with and to embrace what works for them. Each student has their own way of doing well, and every rule can be bent or broken.

This book takes a different approach. It provides no-nonsense, sometimes hard-nosed, advice that is intended to cut across generations. Students learn in different ways. But regardless of a student's background, law professors expect specific things. A student either figures out what the professor wants, or is left behind. Doing what "is comfortable" or what "works for you" is bad advice because when students begin law school they have no idea what works, and the first year of law school is not a comfortable experience. In short, if a student wishes to excel, there *are* right ways to approach law school. This book explains—hopefully in a humorous way—what some of those ways are.

What follows are a series of essays intended to help students understand what law professors expect of them. Written by a cranky, cantankerous professor at the fictional Pryncton Law School, the essays do not mince words. In a grumpy, but straight-talking fashion, each essay instructs students on how to give themselves the best chance of doing well. The essays cover those tasks that stu-

dents commonly face in law school: from reading and briefing cases, to outlining, to preparing and taking exams, to being called on in class. The book also provides advice on success outside the classroom. In many ways, the book promotes professionalism and common sense.

This book distinguishes itself in two ways. First, many law school preparation guides are hundreds of pages long and purport to anticipate every tidbit of information an aspiring law student might wish to know, no matter how tangential. Few students read those books cover to cover. And the advice they provide is often, at best, only marginally useful. In contrast, this is a short book. It is not, and is not intended to be, an exhaustive guide to all things law-school related. It attempts to be concise and to-the-point: an accessible book that can be read quickly. Second, the advice that some preparation books provide is gimmicky. Students are told they can succeed only if they master some closely-guarded secret, which law professors know but conspiratorially refuse to reveal. This book rejects that sort of nonsense. Students succeed in law school not through short cuts and tricks, but through hard work. Instead of peddling gimmicks, this book provides concrete advice on those near-universally agreed upon fundamentals that students must master to do well.

A final point. The authors are not suggesting that professors should be curmudgeonly and cantankerous or seek to emulate this book's jaded professor. The book is not an instruction guide for how professors should teach. In the vein of Kingsfield, Perini, and other caricatures of tough instructors, our jaded professor has been teaching just a little too long. Most law professors these days are a little more humane in their approach. But our crusty professor has sound advice that, if heeded, can help students succeed.