The Zen of Law School Success
The Zen of Law School Success

Chad Noreuil

Clinical Professor of Law
Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law
Arizona State University

Carolina Academic Press
Durham, North Carolina
...the love of my life, my heart & soul,
my inspiration, my greatest teacher, my son.

Special thanks to Marie Ann Lambert, Beth DiFelice, Melody Vogel, Harmony Simmons, Paul Lisnek, Rebecca Chambers, and Natalya Ter-Grigoryan for all of your help in turning this book into a reality. Thank you all!
## Contents

**Introduction** xi

1. **Preparing for the Journey** 3  
   Your Personal Relationships During Law School 9  
   Lifestyle During Law School 10  
   It’s a Marathon, Not a Sprint 12

2. **Knowing Your Universe** 13  
   The Classroom Experience 14  
   Legal Writing 18  
   Study Groups 19  
   The Library 20  
   Your Universe of Important People 21  
   Student Organizations and School Competitions 21  
   The Law School Culture 22  
   Your Three Greatest Treasures 24

3. **The Tao of the Law School Mind** 29  
   Building the Way of the Law School Mind 32  
   Studying 34  
   Outlining 40  
   Studying for Essay Exams 41
CONTENTS

4. Knowing Your True Self
   Knowing What Type of Essay Writer You Are 47
   ANSWER #1: The Law-Based Answer 49
   ANSWER #2: The Fact-Based Answer 50
   ANSWER #3: The Integrated Answer 50

5. Writing Final Exam Essays
   Read the Call of the Question First 58
   After Reading the Call of the Question ... 59
   After Spotting Issues 62
   Writing the Essay 63
   A Quick Recap on Essay Writing: The Least You Need to Know About Writing Your Final Exams 73

6. Noreuil’s Top Ten Tips for Essay Writing 75
   (1) Before the Exam, Know the “Big Ticket” Topics 76
   (2) Have a Template for Writing Out the “Big Ticket” Issues 76
   (3) Don’t Get Too Caught Up in Your Conclusions 77
   (4) Try to Sound Like a Lawyer 77
   (5) Look for Verbal Clues in the Fact Pattern 78
   (6) Answer the Specific Question Asked 79
   (7) Answer the Question You Know Best First 79
   (8) Give Both Sides to Every Argument 80
   (9) Use Transition Words (or “Signposts”) to Guide the Grader 80
   (10) After You Answer a Question, LET IT GO 80

7. Multiple Choice Questions
   Read the Call of the Question First 85
   Critical Reading—The Fact Pattern 86
   Eliminating Answer Choices 88
   Reviewing Your Practice Multiple Choice Questions 90
   A Quick Recap: The Least You Need to Know on Strategies for Answering Multiple Choice Questions 92
8. Noreuil’s Top Ten Tips for Multiple Choice Questions

(1) Don’t Ever Assume Facts
(2) Assume That Every Fact Is Important
(3) Avoid Skipping Around from Question to Question
(4) If Two Answers Are Opposite, One Is Probably True
(5) A More Precise Answer Is Usually Better than a Less Precise Answer
(6) Be Very Leery of Absolutes
(7) Focus on Conjunctions
   - BECAUSE
   - IF
   - ONLY IF
   - UNLESS
(8) When All Else Fails—Choose the Longest Answer
(9) Ask the Universe
(10) After Each Question, Let It Go

9. Handling Negativity and Obstacles

Negative Feeling: Fear of Failure/Doing Poorly
Negative Feeling: I Cannot Learn All of This Information
Negative Feeling: I’m Missing Issues on My Practice Exams
Negative Feeling: I Don’t “Get” a Particular Subject
Negative Feeling: Other People Are Studying More than I Am
Negative Feeling: Overall Anxiety (Or Even Feeling Sick to Your Stomach)
Negative Feeling: I’m Miserable, and I Hate Law School!

10. Knowing Your Universe, Part II — Final Exams

Know Your Professor
Before the Exam — Know Your Locations
Before the Exam — Know the Rules of Protocol
The Day of a Final Exam
After the Exam
Grades
 CONTENTS

11. After the Journey 121
Appendix A  A Note to Those Not Doing as Well as They Had Hoped 123
Appendix B  The Energy Notebook: A Tip for Learning the Law 127
Appendix C  Additional Exercises for Essay Writing 131
Appendix D  Author’s Note and Additional Zen Quotes 141
Index 145
Introduction

When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

If you are reading this, congratulations—you are ready for the law school journey. The purpose of this book is to help you succeed in law school. I have been teaching law school since 2000. I also lectured for eight years in the BARBRI pre-law prep program, where I taught entering law students how to succeed in law school, including classroom skills, study techniques, and exam taking tips and strategies. Moreover, I recently finished a documentary that tracked the lives of nine of my students for all three years of law school. I now share all of this accumulated knowledge with you.

Law school is a very unique experience—one much different than you experienced as an undergrad. It is a challenge that can undermine your confidence and deplete you of all emotional energy. I have had numerous conversations about the struggles of 1L life, and every single semester, there has been at least one student (and usually more) crying during my office hours. Others, however, seem to thrive during the law school experience. So why is it that some students thrive and others crumble?
Several years ago I began to notice that a lot of the advice I tended to give stemmed from Zen principles. In fact, I noticed that there are many parallels between how one should approach law school and how Zen principles teach one to approach life. I incorporated many of these principles into my teaching, which have been incredibly well received by my students. I’ve written this book to reach an even larger audience, in the hope that others might also be helped on the path to achieving law school success.

Zen is a way of life — and so is the process of law school success. This book offers a comprehensive way to approach law school life. The fundamental principles of Zen are the essential fundamental principles that a student should adopt for law school success: focus, discipline, awareness, and balance. This book will address all of these principles as they apply to the law school environment.

In Zen, the ultimate goal is to reach enlightenment (or nirvana). As for law school, the ultimate goal is to succeed (however one might define his or her own success). Accordingly, throughout the book I liken the end goal of enlightenment of Zen with the end goal of “succeeding” in law school.

Again, the fundamental principles of Zen are awareness, focus, discipline, and balance. Remember this during law school because these are the same principles that you need in order to maximize your chances of success. You must be aware of who you are (e.g., what kind of learner you are) and how law school works. You must be focused, having the ability to concentrate on the torts case you are reading, instead of thinking about the office memo you need to write or the contracts outline you need to start. Law school is about discipline — studying when you need to study, even though you have already put in ten hours of reading. And it is about balance — balance between the multitude of law school tasks, and balance between school and your personal life.

In each section of this book, I offer a Zen quote to introduce principles that can be applied to law school life in order to maximize

---

1. Several of the quotes have been passed down from Zen Masters through the years and have no attribution; a handful of quotes/stories are from Daniel...
your chances of success. In addition to offering a comprehensive approach to law school lifestyle, I also offer specific, practical advice for studying, outlining, performing well during the classroom Socratic method, and of course, succeeding on final exams. I sincerely hope you enjoy your path to achieving your enlightenment of law school success.

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. 
— Lao Tzu

Levin’s *The Zen Book* (which I highly recommend); other quotes I have attributed where appropriate.

2. If you find this book helpful, I invite you to visit my website at LawSchoolZen.com to email me and/or explore and receive additional information on law school (and bar exam) tips, strategies, exercises, student advice, quotes of the day, and video clips of the week.