

As published in

| **The Art of Advocacy** |
Online with ACT of Communication®



For more articles and resources, visit our Knowledge Tank at www.actofcommunication.com

| Reprinted from the September 2011 Issue |



Musings by Special New Lawyers

**So now what?:
Reality Check for a law school graduate.**

by Clifton J. McMillan Jr., J.D.

Copyright 2011

Introduction by Katherine James:

Clifton's story of hard work and sacrifice by himself and his family in order to become a law school graduate this past Mother's Day should have a happy ending. But in these tough economic times, his life story has a "school of hard knocks" middle, which he is living through. I think that at least one of you is going to read this story of determination and be moved to give him a boost up to the next step in achieving his dream.

So now what? : Reality Check for a law school graduate

by

Clifton J. McMillan Jr., J.D.

As I slowly walked down the aisle in May 2011 on Mother's Day to the old and familiar notes of Pomp and Circumstance, I felt pride in my accomplishment of graduating from law school. My parents and sister were excited as I became the first person in my family to graduate from law school. I was glad to no longer have to attend night classes full time at Miles Law School four times a week. It was exciting to know that I no longer had to draft law briefs and legal summaries late at night after classes were completed any more.

The only two things to do were to prepare for the Alabama State Bar and to obtain some legal employment. It had been frustrating being unemployed for the last year of law school due to the recession, but I knew that things had to pick up in the legal community soon. Thankfully my parents helped me pay my bills when I became unemployed and allowed me to live in their house. So I revised my resume, polished up my cover letter, and proceeded to apply for legal jobs. I figured since I had worked before during law school as a full-time law clerk, a Wal-Mart cashier, and a library assistant at my local public library, finding a legal job should be not very difficult. I was completely wrong on that account.

I began to "pound the pavement", so to speak. I talked to my law professors and asked if there were any positions available in their legal firms. I looked through online job websites like craigslist and monster.com daily and applied for every legal assistant/law clerk/paralegal job that was advertised. Then I searched through the classified ads in the local newspapers. I also spoke face to face with other attorneys and introduced myself to them, explaining my desire for legal employment. Many of these attorneys apologized to me and said that they would hire me, but their law practices were suffering so badly that they had been forced to cut back on staff. I have sent out over one hundred resumes.

Occasionally, I have received a courtesy reply informing me that a legal position has been filled. So far, I can count the number of interviews I have received on one hand.

One interview ended in disaster because the interviewing attorney thought I did not have an extensive enough resume for a temporary summer legal job. He only interviewed me because his bosses forced him to. There was little encouragement or respect from his end. He spent half the interview bragging about how he was in law review while in law school, how he had published several articles and was lead counsel in 20 legal trials. In his opinion, it was best to be in law school full time during the day and seek to compose publishable legal papers if you wanted to be an attorney. He had a low regard for night law school graduates, even if they had to work during the day to pay their bills like I did.

It was hard to sit there and listen to this attorney, but I was polite. The whole time I was thinking how insecure and arrogant he had to be to try to impress me and everyone else in earshot with his resume. It was already posted on the law firm's website, and I had read it. I also remembered that a law professor told me that just because you can write excellent legal papers in law school does not mean you will make a great attorney. Several professors also stated that good attorneys come from day law schools and night law schools. Needless to say, I did not get the job.

Then there was another temporary legal job that I had applied for. It was a legal temporary staffing agency seeking legal claims consultants for a 6 month unnamed legal project helping a large group of plaintiffs fill out settlement claim forms. The job involved extensive travel, but it was fine because the staffing agency was providing hotel rooms, rental cars and computer equipment.

I made it through two phone interviews and was flown out to Las Vegas for legal training in June 2011. I was placed in a team with a supervising attorney and a couple of experienced paralegals. We proceeded to travel to different states in order to collect information for settlement from the plaintiffs. However, there were some problems.

There were more plaintiffs than had been originally anticipated, and our four person staff was not large enough to assist everyone. The staffing agency said they were going to send a couple of other people to assist us, but never did. Our hotel arrangements and rental cars were canceled twice by someone in the staffing agency, causing delays. One hotel we were staying in had roaches, mold and ants. The computer equipment was outdated and would fail at the worst possible times. Wireless internet needed for the computer equipment was spotty at best. A rental car overheated while we were on the road.

We diligently reported all these issues to the staffing agency, and heard promises that things would improve so that we could perform our job effectively. They never did. Our paychecks were delayed for several weeks, and every time we asked about our pay there was a new excuse. Meanwhile, we continued to await reimbursement from the staffing agency for personal monies expended.

A couple of attorneys who were in charge of the legal project told us to placate the plaintiffs about returning to assist them with their claims forms at a later date. It appeared uncertain that this promise was realistic. I was disgusted and discouraged.

I sat up late at night thinking about how I had been told that this would help jumpstart my legal career by the attorneys while I was training in Las Vegas. I had been jobless for about a year. But I knew I couldn't keep getting up and working in a bad environment with no support and the team was falling apart. The staffing agency failed to live up to its end of the agreement as it concerned payment, transportation, and lodging. Most of all, I refused to lie to the plaintiffs we were supposed to be helping. They deserved better.

So I resigned about 3 weeks into the assignment in early July 2011, and the supervising attorney and one paralegal resigned as well. One paralegal remained on the assignment from my original team. The staffing agency put our jobs up on online websites such as monster.com the day after they accepted our resignations. I hope that the plaintiffs received the help needed.

Then I came home to my parents' house and called the state bar to find out what was the delay in their acceptance of my application, which I had completed online per their requests by the stated deadline and paid the fee. I needed a number in order to get into the testing place. The response of the state bar was that they never received my application, and that they had been upgrading their systems. I asked if I could mail them a hard copy, and I was told that I would have to wait to reapply since the application process for the 2012 exam was not yet open. The bar was kind enough to refund me my application fee, minus the convenience processing fee.

After realizing that I was jobless and unable to take the bar until at least 2012, I was deeply discouraged. I also was dealing with sickness in my immediate family. I had wondered if I had made a mistake in seeking to become an attorney. Should I have instead gone to library school? A couple of my law professors told us that there would be challenges in getting into the legal field during a recession, but we didn't really understand the magnitude of the situation. It took encouragement from my family, my church, and good friends to help me realize I was still on the right track to success. Also, reading online articles about how many law school graduates all across the United States were having difficulty finding legal employment helped me realize I was not alone.

Therefore, I decided to keep actively searching for legal employment and study for the bar. I am uncertain as to how this will end up, but I am still determined to become an attorney of law. However, I will stay encouraged and remember the words of Winston Churchill, "Never, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, give up. Never give up. Never give up. Never give up."

Biography:

Clifton J. McMillan, Jr. earned his B.A. in History with a minor in communication from Oakwood University (located in Huntsville, AL). He earned his J.D. from Miles Law School (located in Fairfield, AL). He currently lives in Shelby County, Alabama and is studying for the Alabama State Bar. He can be reached at clifton.mcmillanjr@gmail.com.