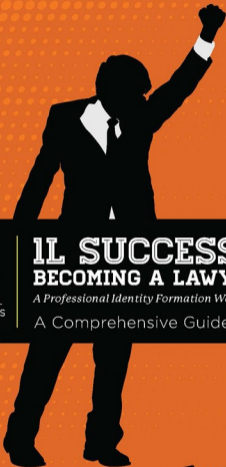


SARA J. BERMAN



LAW  
SCHOOL  
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SERIES

# 1L SUCCESS: BECOMING A LAWYER

*A Professional Identity Formation Workbook*

A Comprehensive Guide

 WEST  
ACADEMIC

## Introduction

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Congratulations! Your life is about to change. You are not just “going” to law school. You have embarked on a legal education journey of lifelong learning. Your identity is already in transformation. You are becoming a lawyer. You are working to earn a degree and professional license that will open future doors and create a lifetime of opportunity.

Your education is powerful and precious; no one can ever take it away. When you fully invest in this new law school world—meaning when you get to know the people, take chances, and use the incredible resources available to you—not only will you learn rules of law, legal reasoning, and lawyering skills, you will become part of something bigger.

You will never see yourself or the world around you the same. You will learn a different language and think about things in a different manner. People will seek your advice. And, you will have critically important choices to make about who you want to be as a lawyer and leader.

### First-Year Law Students (1Ls): This Is for You

This workbook is written for you and to you. It is not a rule book or skills guide. There are plenty of those. I will recommend some great ones, and faculty and librarians in your law school will recommend others.

This is also not a scholarly work on professional identity formation; you can find many of those referenced in sources in the Acknowledgements above.

You might think of this book as a conversation with a law school success coach. We’ll focus together on clearing the way for you to do your very best, and enjoy the process, as you embark on and proceed along your legal education journey.

You can read and work through parts of this workbook before law school to get a head start, during your first semester as you delve into classes and prepare for your first set of law school exams, and in your second semester to improve upon first semester grades, re-focus habits, better manage time and stress, and more successfully cope with other law school challenges. I hope the book also helps you find greater fulfillment along the way.

This workbook will also help families, friends, spouses, and partners of law students to see why law school is so different and so difficult, and to understand how best to learn to lend a hand, or back off, as needed. Friends and family: as key players in the life of a law student, your support is critical. So, thank you!

Let’s start here. Going to law school is like spending three years abroad—the language, customs, rules, and, well, basically everything is different. Law schools, like foreign countries, have their own:

- Governments, with administrations headed by deans, faculty committees, boards of directors or advisory boards, student organizations, and alumni groups;

- Laws, including a student handbook, faculty handbook, honor code, internal policies, and external standards from accrediting bodies such as the ABA and state and regional accreditors;
- Leadership including administrators, faculty, professional staff, student leaders;
- History, with institutional history (some unwritten and some noted in meeting minutes and law school magazines) and alumni/professor stories about how things used to be;
- Customs inside the law school and in the greater legal education and professional communities; and
- Language with terminology, jargon, slang, acronyms, and abbreviations.

Feeling that you belong in this new world does not happen just because you get in the door. You can travel to a foreign country and stay in an American hotel, eat American foods, and never even talk with locals! Or, you can live abroad, work to really get to know the people, and become part of a new community and culture. When you immerse yourself, you become richer; a part of that new country stays with you forever.

Similarly, when you invest yourself fully in law school, far above and beyond the already significant monetary investment you are making, you become part of the legal profession for life, and it becomes a part of you. My hope is that will all be for the better.

It is OK, though, if at first law school feels overwhelming. No, it's more than OK; it is totally normal! Even if you succeeded in every previous academic endeavor (maybe especially if you did), it's perfectly reasonable to wonder and worry here. But almost everyone who starts law school finishes and graduates. Likely, you will too. It won't be easy, but it will be immensely rewarding.

### Professional Identity Formation

There are many excellent books about law school. Some focus on rules of law, others on skills. This workbook is a success companion guide; it provides strategies to excel in the law school environment and dedicated space to process your own personal reflections and contextualize the transformation you are undergoing as you work toward becoming a lawyer. Law school has not traditionally provided space for such reflection, but I believe it is important; hence, this workbook.

We will be realistic, but we will focus on making your legal education journey a positive and empowering experience.

ABA standards were recently updated to include that, "a law school shall provide substantial opportunities to students for . . . the development of a professional identity." According to the ABA's interpretation of Standard 303(b):

"[P]rofessional identity focuses on what it means to be a lawyer and the special obligations lawyers have to their clients and society. The development of a professional identity should involve an intentional exploration of the values, guiding principles, and well-being practices considered foundational to successful legal practice. Because developing a professional identity requires reflection and growth over time, students should have frequent opportunities during each year of law school and in a variety of courses and co-curricular and professional development activities."

At the same time, the ABA also added a provision to Standard 303 that, "[a] law school shall provide education to law students on bias, cross-cultural competency, and racism: (1) at the start of the program of legal education, and (2) at least once again before graduation." (Standard 303(c).)

The ABA states:

“[T]he importance of cross-cultural competence to professionally responsible representation and the obligation of lawyers to promote a justice system that provides equal access and eliminates bias, discrimination, and racism in the law should be among the values and responsibilities of the legal profession to which students are introduced.”

Throughout this workbook, you’ll find opportunities for self-reflection about your professional identity formation (“PIF”) and cross-cultural competency (“CCC”), including learning to improve your ability to effectively communicate and work as a future lawyer with people whose backgrounds differ from yours.

You may work through these PIF and/or CCC reflections independently or as part of class or workshop. You can keep your completed reflections in a dedicated PIF folder on your laptop, or complete these in notes on your phone just for you. And, you can return to these later in law school and in practice to get back in touch with your earlier thinking. You will be amazed at your own transformation—and/or at how your core values may well remain the same.

Why focus on PIF? Not just because the ABA says law schools must incorporate this training, but because seeing your legal education journey through professional lenses will help you:

- Focus on the bigger picture beyond day-to-day challenges,
- Remain positive,
- Find deeper meaning that will keep you inspired and moving forward, and
- Become the lawyer you want to be, someone whose actions are aligned not only with formal rules of professional responsibility but with your own values and beliefs.

In short, this perspective will help you succeed now and serve clients well when you graduate, cultivating habits and perspectives that will lead to a lifetime of professional satisfaction.

What you do and how you think, your actions and your mindset as you proceed on this journey, will help get you through today’s struggles and will pay success dividends for decades to come. Especially when something is tough, and it will be, or when you feel you don’t belong, or when a concept is so confusing that you get a headache trying to understand it, you will stay more balanced, motivated, and hopefully happy(!) when you use the tools we will discuss throughout this book.

Two examples of many strategies we will return to are:

- Reframing “problems” as “opportunities,” sometimes even “gifts,” and,
- Pausing or “taking a beat” (or taking time to breathe) in the heat of particularly stressful moments. Sometimes even just the tiniest “pause” will provide the distance to see that many daily “battles” just won’t be that significant in the long run. (Will this matter five days or five years from now?)

Much of what we will talk about and reflect on in this workbook is personal and unique to you. This is your success journey. You are very much on your own path. I’m not going to tell you what to do or how to think; I am going to suggest strategies for you to use as you see fit, to enhance your awareness, focus your priorities, and thrive in the face of the inevitable challenges. And I’ll celebrate with you as you make mistakes, overcome them, and settle into professional success (whatever that means to you).

Now, I know you may just be starting 1L, but let's play a backward design game for a moment. After graduation, when you are licensed, what will it mean for you to be a lawyer?

A couple of caveats before the reflection:

1) The book refers to becoming a lawyer. There are many wonderful ways to earn a living with a law degree other than practicing law. We find lawyers in every slice of life including business and education, politics and government, sports and the arts, communications, and hospitality. But because our identity is so profound, many of us continue to think of ourselves as lawyers, perhaps "non-practicing lawyers," even as we work in other professional capacities. So, for readers who are not sure you want to work as a lawyer after graduation, all good! Keep reading and completing the reflections throughout this book. And, any time you want to substitute the word, "lawyer" with whatever best describes your professional vision, go right ahead.

2) Throughout the book, we refer to walking, movement, and other physical exercise. Please know that implied in those references is "if or as you are able and comfortable with." Nowhere do I mean to exclude or be disrespectful.

3) On a similar note, language is constantly changing. I have tried throughout this workbook to write in an inclusive and respectful manner. But, cross cultural competency is a lifelong learning process for us all, myself included. So, if you have suggestions for future editions, please drop me a line.

Alright, time for action. Take out your phone, laptop, or a pen and paper and complete this first PIF Reflection. Don't think, just write. This is for your eyes only. We'll revisit these questions later in the book, and your responses may well change. No problem! Just take out your phone or a pen and put down the first words that come to mind.

### **PIF Reflection: Find Your "Why"**

What does "becoming a lawyer" mean for you?

What changes have you noticed in yourself since you started law school?

What do you see changing throughout your law school years? (You may not be able to answer this question yet, but give it a try; your thoughts, concerns, and insights might surprise you.)

What do you see changing in your life once you have a law license?

## Chapter

Many people will tell you there is nothing special to do to prepare before law school begins. Just take a break so you can relax a bit if you are going straight from college or working in an intense job. Then, show up and be present at Orientation and take it from there.

That can work. But especially if you are first gen or don't know any lawyers, you may want to demystify law school and prepare ahead of time. There are online pre-law programs and books you might read before Orientation or soon after starting law school including:

- *1L of a Ride: A Well-Traveled Professor's Roadmap to Success in the First Year of Law School* (4th Ed.) by Andrew J. McClurg
- *Introduction to the Study and Practice of Law in a Nutshell* (8th Ed.) by Kenney Hegland
- *Cracking the Case Method: Legal Analysis for Law School Success* (3d Ed.) by Paul Bergman, Patrick Goodman, and Thomas Holm

You may complete parts of an online program or read certain chapters of a book—perhaps the ones that make sense to you now—and return to other parts later. Read the parts that inform, prepare, and/or demystify law school, especially if that makes you feel less stress. If these make you feel further stress, save them for later.

In addition to learning about law school, take care of “life logistics” before you start. Find a place to live, explore transportation options, handle student loan matters, create a budget, buy supplies including a new laptop if you need one. Do anything that might clear your plate of outside responsibilities. You want to free up as much time and mental space as possible for the first couple of months of law school.

Another thing some of my students have said was helpful before law school was to take an online typing course to improve their speed and accuracy. This will help with both taking notes in class and typing under pressure on exams.

However you prepare, and even if you've been to campus before, Orientation may feel like you have walked into another world. That is normal.

Law schools put a lot of thought, time, and energy into Orientation. Read anything your school sends about Orientation. This may include homework, such as a case to read and brief (summarize in a particular way that you will learn about), and logistical information such as where to park.

If you have questions or are concerned about something, reach out and ask before you arrive. Some students need clarification about what to wear or how early the building opens if they must arrive before the sessions begin. (Tip: you will likely be given a tour of the building and possibly the campus so wear or bring walking shoes.)

At Orientation, you will hear from key administrators and professors. You may have a mock class and/or a workshop on basic law school skills such as case briefing, note-taking, and outlining. You may attend social events or be asked to participate in a team-building exercise to meet and get to know your future classmates.

The advice in these first sessions will help you succeed every step of the way. But taking in all the information can be totally overwhelming. First, it's often way more than you can absorb. Second, because it's all new, you may not grasp the importance of what is said. Finally, most people are nervous—and nerves can hinder one's ability to take it all in.

In fact, some students find themselves in full panic mode at Orientation. If this is you, you are not alone. Here are some of the stressful internal dialogues students have told me they had in their heads during Orientation, and my responses:

- It feels like all of these people are smarter than me. Are they? The answer to this one is simple: No.
- Will I do as well here as I did in college? This is a maybe. Most law schools have forced grading curves so not everyone gets the A. But don't focus on this now. You may have felt similarly nervous on day 1 of high school or college, but you got through those, and you will get through this. Just try to absorb and take notes on anything that seems important and look back at these notes a few weeks into the semester.
- Will I be humiliated in class? Maybe. Law professors often conduct class in a Q & A format, as opposed to lecturing. Some professors let students know when they will be called on to speak in class; others engage in what is sometimes described as "cold calling" and randomly question students.

And law professor questions are often not straightforward. Rather, a professor might describe a fictional scenario (called a "hypo") and ask individual students to indicate what the outcome would be and why based on similar court cases read as homework. Sometimes, a student answers in a way the professor expects or likes, so the professor moves on to another question or another student, and that's the end of it. Other times, a professor may "grill" the student, asking repeated follow-up questions in such a way that there is no right answer, or a professor may say the first student was wrong in what feels like a harsh manner and call on another student.

So, yes, you will likely be called on in class, and that process may feel humiliating. Know that it is not designed as a personal attack. It is a teaching and learning strategy. Some professors do it just because that's how law school was for them; others believe it is the best way to prepare students for future questioning by tough judges or contentious arguments with opposing counsel.

Do not take it personally and try not to let it bother you. Class participation points are not common in most first-year courses, and rarely would a 1L student be graded on the quality of an in-class response so long as they did the reading and are prepared. And most professors (other than in legal writing) grade final exams anonymously. So, what happens in class and on exams is entirely separate.

- Will I make friends? Quite likely, yes! You may be checking out your future classmates, wondering whom you will or won't like. Remember that this is professional school. Think of

your classmates as colleagues. They won't know your grades unless you tell them, but they will recall what you said and did in law school. They will remember whether you showed up on time and followed through with your commitments. If you acted professionally in law school, chances are that classmates will refer clients to you and/or give you leads on coveted job opportunities for decades to come.

- Your professional reputation starts at Orientation. I vividly recall my law school orientation. The Dean greeted us with what started as the familiar refrain, "Look to your right, look to your left." But, instead of ending with, "One of you won't be here after this semester," she declared, "One may be your future law partner."

### **PIF Reflections:**

- What have people told you about law school? Which parts do you think are myth and which reality?
- What are you looking forward to and what are you nervous about?
- How do you want your classmates to think of you?
- What do you want people to remember ten years from now when they hear your name?

### Important Info During Orientation

As you start school and throughout your first year, you will have a million questions about every aspect of your new world including:

- Student loans,
- Buying books and accessing online resources,
- Student health resources (physical and mental health and wellness),
- Housing,
- Attendance policies,
- Commuting,
- Summer jobs after 1L, and
- How to register and what to take as 2L and 3L classes.

Knowing whom to talk with or reach out to when you have a particular question, concern, or challenge makes all the difference. So, despite the nerves and distracting thoughts, pay as close attention as you can during Orientation.



Even if you don't remember everything they say (and you won't!), write down the names, titles, and job areas of the people who speak. Put each person in your contacts, along with one helpful tip they shared. Later, if you need something from the Dean of Students or a particular professor, for example, recalling their advice from Orientation can be a great conversation starter.

The chart below can help to keep track of the names of people in each of the various student-facing offices that present at Orientation. You can create a similar chart on your laptop or put info in notes on your phone. You can also add people who speak at Orientation to your Contacts and include their best tips along with their contact info.

Make a note of any documents that law school administrators or faculty say you should read and know where to find them—such as the Student Handbook.

### NAME/CONTACT NOTES

Orientation Notes

TITLE

Dean of the Law School

Dean of Students

Academic Support Faculty

Financial Aid

Career Planning and Placement

Professors

Law Librarian

Registrar

Student Leaders

Future Classmates

Notes, thoughts, comments:

#### **PIF Reflections:**

1. What are your top three takeaways from Orientation?
2. Name three people you met.
3. What is something that you are confused about and want to clarify?