

barbri®

YOUR CAREER SUCCESS GUIDE

# Professional Skills Handbook



# Continuous Learning Sets Exceptional Lawyers Apart



YOU PASSED THE BAR EXAM. YOU LANDED A POSITION AT A RESPECTED FIRM.

But why do some lawyers thrive while others struggle to advance? The answer isn't just found in law school transcripts or bar scores—it's in the knowledge, experience, and professional skills that transform good lawyers into exceptional ones.

The legal profession demands more than substantive knowledge. **Today's successful attorneys master client communication, excel at negotiation, and deliver compelling written arguments.** Understanding what is needed in this profession and building the right skills separates attorneys who enjoy rewarding, varied careers from those who simply practice law.

## Your Roadmap to a Successful Legal Career

This guide provides an overview of the knowledge and professional skills critical for legal career success, highlights where traditional legal education falls short, and outlines the competencies that make great attorneys indispensable.

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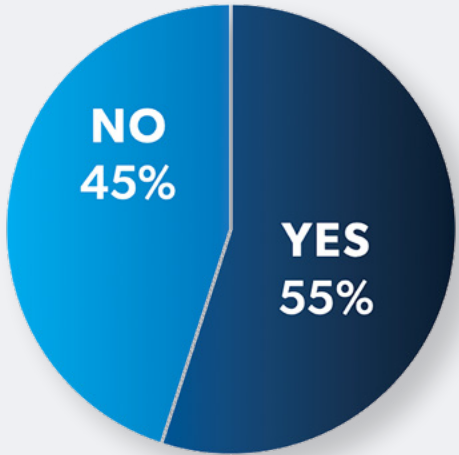
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# Understanding the Skills Gap



**45% of junior associates**  
believe law school  
did not equip them for practice

## LAW SCHOOL TEACHES YOU TO THINK LIKE A LAWYER. BUT DOES IT TEACH YOU TO PRACTICE LIKE ONE?

According to a survey published in April 2024 by legal recruiting firm Major, Lindsey & Africa and legal data intelligence provider Leopard Solutions, nearly half of junior associates felt unprepared by law school for their early years of practice.

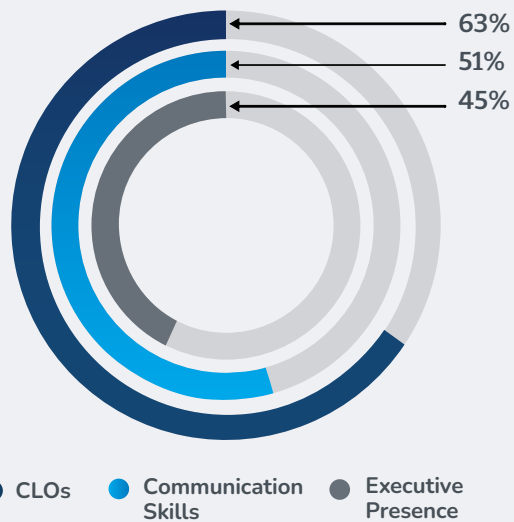
The study, titled [Beyond Tradition: Gen-Z's Approach to BigLaw](#), surveyed 546

junior associates and found that 45% believed their legal education did not equip them for the realities of their early years in practice.

**Consider this: law schools focus heavily on case analysis and theoretical frameworks. Yet practicing attorneys spend most of their time communicating with clients, drafting documents, negotiating settlements, and managing relationships. Understanding the difference and then building the skills you need most are often the ones you've practiced least.**

Building these essential skills positions junior associates for faster advancement and greater impact. Mastering client communication fosters stronger relationships, negotiating effectively secures better outcomes for clients, and writing persuasively ensures legal arguments carry weight. Together, these competencies help attorneys thrive while supporting the firm's success and reputation.





**63% of CLOs**  
(Chief Legal Officers)  
say they are seeking to develop greater business acumen among the lawyers in their department, followed by communication skills (51%), and executive presence (45%)

MASTERING THE  
TECHNICAL SIDE OF  
LAW IS ONLY HALF  
THE EQUATION.

**T**O TRULY EXCEL, today’s legal professionals must cultivate a broader set of professional skills that elevate performance, strengthen client relationships, and drive business success.

[2024 ACC Chief Legal Officers Survey](#)



Legal writing, communication, client service, and business development are just a few of the capabilities that set exceptional lawyers apart—though there are many others that continue to shape modern practice.

Essential Professional Skills  
for Career Success





# Legal Writing: Your Most Powerful Tool



Legal writing isn't just about following citation formats

It's about persuading judges, informing clients, and advocating effectively for your position.

The difference between adequate and **exceptional legal writing often determines case outcomes.**

A well-crafted brief can sway a judge's opinion. A clearly written settlement agreement can save clients thousands of dollars in litigation costs.

Yet many attorneys struggle with legal writing throughout their careers. They use unnecessarily complex language, fail to structure arguments logically, or write without considering their audience's needs.



## STRONG LEGAL WRITING SKILLS ENABLE YOU TO:



Draft compelling motions that win cases



Create clear contracts that prevent disputes



Communicate complex legal concepts to non-lawyer clients



Build credibility with colleagues and opposing counsel

# Client Communication: Building Trust + Loyalty

Clear, effective communication helps clients feel understood, confident, and supported throughout their cases.

“Great leaders communicate and great communicators lead.”  
— Simon Sinek



## EFFECTIVE CLIENT COMMUNICATION INVOLVES:



Active listening to understand client concerns fully



Explaining legal concepts in accessible language



Setting realistic expectations about case outcomes and timelines



Providing regular updates that keep clients informed and engaged



# Client Service: Delivering Exceptional Value



These skills transform good lawyers into trusted advisors

When clients feel heard, understood, and supported, they're not just satisfied—they become long-term advocates for your practice and your firm.

Delivering exceptional client service is imperative for every attorney. However, achieving this level of service requires more than just good intentions—it begins with a dedicated, thoughtful approach to understanding and meeting client needs.



## ATTORNEYS WHO PRIORITIZE CLIENT SERVICE:



Understand each client's business or personal objectives to provide practical, results-oriented advice



Maintain clear, timely communication to prevent confusion and frustration



Manage expectations honestly and follow through on commitments



Deliver value that extends beyond the immediate matter at hand



# Business Development: Growing Your Practice



To achieve a successful practice, you need both legal expertise and business development skills to attract clients, build relationships, and grow your reputation in the legal community.

These skills become increasingly important as you advance in your career, but often firms wait too long to impart training and experience related to business development to their associates. Partners at law firms are expected to generate business, not just practice law. Bringing associates up to speed quickly allows partners to focus on leveraging their expertise and growing the firm. Solo practitioners must also master business development to survive.



## KEY BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COMPETENCIES INCLUDE:



Networking  
effectively at  
professional events



Creating content  
that demonstrates  
your expertise



Building referral  
relationships with  
other attorneys



Managing your  
professional  
reputation online  
and offline



# The Competitive Advantage of Professional Skills Training



**W**HY DO SOME ATTORNEYS CONSISTENTLY OUTPERFORM their peers? The answer lies in their commitment to understanding and building these critical professional skills beyond basic legal competencies.

Consider two attorneys with similar backgrounds: both graduated from good law schools, passed the bar exam, and worked at comparable firms. One invests time in developing professional acumen, knowledge, and skills through structured training programs. The other relies solely on on-the-job experience.

## AFTER FIVE YEARS, THE ATTORNEY WHO PURSUED SKILLS TRAINING TYPICALLY:



**Handles more complex cases with greater confidence**



**Maintains stronger client relationships**



**Advances to leadership positions more quickly**

**Earns higher compensation and enjoys greater job security**

This isn't a coincidence. Structured professional skills training provides systematic improvement that casual experience cannot match. You could develop professional skills through years of practice, learning from mistakes, and gradually improving. But why choose the slow, uncertain path when proven training programs can accelerate your development?



# BARBRI Professional Development: Your Path to Excellence

We understand that passing the bar exam is just the beginning of your legal career journey...

That's why over 250,000 professionals have trusted BARBRI with their legal education.

**B**ARBRI PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT helps you close the gap between legal education and real-world practice. Our programs blend proven learning methods with legal-specific practical skill-building, created by attorneys for attorneys.

Designed for busy professionals, our flexible, efficient courses fit your schedule and learning style. Whether you're a new graduate bridging core skills or a seasoned lawyer refining specific competencies, BARBRI provides targeted training that works.

“

[Professional Skills courses] speak the language of law firms, while also emphasizing universal skills like communication, leadership, and accountability.

Bill Cocolis | Director of Talent Management at Akin

”



## OUR PROGRAMS COVER ESSENTIAL AREAS INCLUDING:



### Advanced Legal Writing:

Move beyond basic writing competency to craft persuasive, clear, and effective legal documents that achieve your clients' objectives.



### Client Relations:

Develop communication and relationship-building skills that create loyal clients and generate referrals.



### Practice Management:

Learn the business skills necessary to run an efficient, profitable practice while maintaining high ethical standards.



### Professional Skills Integration:

Understand how different professional competencies work together to create exceptional legal representation.



# Your Next Steps

Professional development is essential for attorneys who want to build successful, satisfying careers in today's world.

## START BY HONESTLY ASSESSING YOUR CURRENT SKILL LEVELS.

Where do you feel most confident? Which areas need the most improvement? Consider any feedback you've received from supervisors, clients, or colleagues.

## NEXT, PRIORITIZE YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS.

Focus first on the skills that will have the greatest impact on your current role and immediate career goals. If you struggle with client communication, that should be your starting point. If your writing needs improvement, make that your priority.

## FINALLY, EMBRACE A STRUCTURED DEVELOPMENT PLAN.

BARBRI's Professional Development programs offer a proven path for developing the skills that distinguish successful attorneys from those who simply practice law. Your clients deserve the best representation you can provide. Your career deserves the foundation that only comprehensive professional skills can create.

# Take the Next Step Toward Leveling Up Your Legal Career

[Learn More](#)

**barbri**  
empowering every step  
of the legal learning journey

