

**Many of our clients have children that are thinking of studying law . We were lucky to have Alice come in during her University holidays to help us out . Whilst she is heading away to Wellington for her first job we hope she will come back some day and work for us !!. Before she left we asked her to write an article about what its like to be a law student .**

Suits had me convinced that studying law and working in a law office would be a daunting, challenging and exhilarating experience all at the same time. I wasn't deceived on this point. But I quickly realised that just as Grey's Anatomy contains a somewhat inaccurate portrayal of reality, so too does Suits.

Indeed, it can be hard to grasp what studying and working in law might actually be like without experiencing it for yourself. And there's no shortage of stories out there, from the accurate to the utterly fantastical.

As a Southland girl at heart, I already look forward to one day returning to Preston Russell as a 'real lawyer', after experiencing all that Simpson Grierson in Wellington has to offer. But first, I feel I should offer some insight to fellow Southlanders as to the true madness and reward of being a law student.

### **What law school teaches you**

Law school evidently teaches you the law, as well as how to write and think clearly. Conviction becomes key, and you learn to summarise large amounts of reading into concise sentences. You begin to look for the detail in any scenario and weigh both sides of a case before arguing about anything - including whose turn it is to wash the dishes at the flat!

The law school environment swarms with determination, which is one of the reasons I think students always push themselves to succeed. But the horror stories of students spending every waking hour in the library for four years with their heads buried in books is not true.

### **What the law office teaches you**

To my luck, my first day on the job at Preston Russell found me sitting in on an employment mediation. After witnessing a settlement play out rather favourably for our client on account of Mary-Jane, it occurred to me that what you don't learn at law school is how to be a good lawyer in real life.

This is where experience becomes crucial. Learning to be a lawyer without hands on experience would be like learning to ride a bike with only the manual. Other practical things I've learned on the job include how to use document management systems, draft letters to clients, complete internal memos, use precedents and how to record time (very important).

Time spent at any law firm during study breaks will not only mean you've got your foot in the door when it comes time to finding a full time job, it'll ease the transition from study to work.

### **What I have learned**

*Your experience of studying law is whatever you want it to be.*

As with university generally, your experience comes down to what you make of it. Law students have a plethora of options for extra-curricular activities, be it mooting (mock appeal

trials where you get to pretend you're a barrister), notorious law camps (where you'll make memories you later wish to forget), or the student society (where your political skills will be put to test).

You get the tools to customise your experience as you see fit, so long as you make time for your work. For god sake don't bury yourself in those books for four years!

*Likewise, there are many ways and means to develop your career.*

Graduate roles at big firms are fantastic for young lawyers who want the experience that big firms offer, but equally as valuable is the work in regional firms, boasting a broad range of work and a close support network for those new to the profession. The only 'right' way to develop your career it is the way that suits you best.

*You'll develop interest in areas you never imagined.*

While I'm sure many people rock up to university with a professed love for contract law, it seems that the norm is to start study dead set on being a human rights lawyer.

The compulsory subjects like property law, contract law and legal history may seem boring at first, but can turn out to be the most profound. For example, you'll realise how contract law permeates our lives, and affects us whether we're buying concert tickets, a coffee, or simply downloading snapchat.

### **What to do if you're not sure**

If you or your child is interested in studying law, contacting any students or lawyers you know, heading down to the court and watching an open trial, or sitting in on any public lectures might help you decide.

I would also recommend thinking about whether your interests coincide with a career in law. For example, if you enjoy critical thinking, arguing your point, writing or research, then you're more likely to enjoy yourself and be good at it. Likewise if you enjoy English based subjects at school (which I recommend taking to prepare yourself), law may well be the right choice.

### **The rest is up to you**

If you do choose to pursue law, enjoy the experience. For the sake of transparency, I only started enjoying law a year in to my degree, when I realised (a) the workload is manageable and (b) there is seldom a 'right' answer to a legal issue; only a good one. But following that I never looked back.

At risk of sounding cliché, if you're interested in law and think you can tackle those case law readings, I truly recommend doing it.