

## **“Ask a Lawyer – Molly Campera”**

### **1. *Everyone knows that law school and the Bar are difficult and stressful; what helped to keep you focused and your head above water? Any tips for current students?***

“For me, studying for the Bar didn’t start until after law school. You take a Bar prep class that basically teaches you how to take the test, so I didn’t structure my legal education around what I thought I needed for the Bar, and I have no regrets about doing that. The Bar prep class will teach you everything you need to know about the test; it can be painful, but if you put in the work you’ll be prepared.

Throughout law school, and actually through Bar prep, I worked part-time in retail jobs completely separate from anything law-related. For me, this was really helpful because it was a scheduled time every week that I got to be around non-law students and talk about non-law school things, which did wonderful things for my sanity and kept myself balanced.”

### **2. *July 2018 Bar pass rates in California saw a drop that hit a 70-year low, with 20 out of the 21 ABA-accredited law schools in the state suffering a [pass rate decrease ranging from 1%-21%](#). Results were generally down across the country. As a result, many students are preparing to take it again in 2019 (in addition to new first-time takers). If you did not pass the Bar on your first attempt, how did you prepare differently the next time around? Whether or not you passed on your first try, what preparatory steps do you think helped you the most, and were you able to carry any of those strategies into your professional life?***

“I passed on my first try, but I ended up moving from Massachusetts to Washington, so I had to take the Bar again anyway. Most notably for me, and I realized this about myself: I was not a great auditory learner. I always did better by reading things, doing practice questions and writing things down rather than listening to lectures. So the second time around, I skipped the lectures; I just did the practice questions, spending my time on things that I knew actually worked for me instead of doing what the curriculum said just because the curriculum said it. I think that made me a little more efficient and made my time more fruitful.”

### **3. *After graduating, what were the first few years of your professional life like? How did that compare to the expectations you had during school?***

“I was admitted in November ’15, so I guess I’m still technically in my first few years of practice. But I think I had a somewhat more realistic expectation of what [work] would look like because I had so much hands-on experience in a lot of the [types of] places that I wanted to work. When I was at the small firm in Boston, most of my work was reviewing discovery, writing motions, and had very little in-court experience. But when I came out to Seattle, I started doing misdemeanor work, moving through cases very quickly, being in court a lot, and working with clients one-on-one a lot.

It really depends on what type of environment you're in that determines what you're day-to-day life will look like. Unsurprisingly, at a firm you're doing more document review, office-based work; but if you're in a public sector job, you tend to do a lot more hands-on work with clients and working in court. My first year in misdemeanors in Seattle I did six trials – so you really learn on your feet. That wasn't necessarily a surprise, but it was the biggest learning curve for me. Learning how to get a case, prep it for trial and take it to trial within 60-90 days."

**4. *Being able to effectively network with peers, associates, and employers is a major factor in furthering a professional career, particularly in the legal field. It doesn't stop once you have a job; you have to continually grow your network. Are there any common misconceptions or outdated advice that you've heard regarding the "proper" way to network in today's work environment?***

"I don't think there's necessarily a 'proper' or 'improper' way to network; it really depends on the person. I tend to be pretty introverted, so I tried going to those big networking events where you go around and schmooze people, but it just didn't work for me because that's not a type of environment that I do well in.

The networks that I built were through internships and my jobs, letting my work speak for itself. [I built] relationships with the people I worked with directly and in court, those that were around me. It worked well for me, but I think everyone needs to know what they're good at, what their strengths are, and go from there. And I think that with how easy it is to reach out to people [online] that you don't know, building that type of authentic relationship with people through work and actually learning from someone instead of just using them for your network is probably the most beneficial thing you can do.

It also depends on what you want to go into. Public-interest groups don't tend to show up at those big schmoozing events simply because they don't have the time or money for the most part. So it's really about finding the environment that fits the type of career that you want to go into."

**5. *What are the top 3 things you learned as a lawyer that you wish you'd known when first starting?***

"The first one for me is very career specific, but I wish I had more of a social work education coming out [of law school]. Things like: what the DSM diagnoses are, what the symptoms are and de-escalation techniques. That's obviously very specific to public defense, where you're dealing with people who are in crisis a lot, or who have acute mental health issues and symptoms, but it's something that law schools generally aren't prepared to teach you.

Second, how to manage your time in a way that gets everything done that you need, while also taking care of yourself. Public defense can be a very consuming career – most people I work with put in 50-60 hours per week at a minimum, or more if they're in trial, and still don't get everything done that we wish we could. So learning how to balance client communications, reviewing all the discovery, writing things, appearing in court. All this while also not burning out is really important.

The last thing is knowing when the job isn't the right fit and being okay with stepping away from it. When I moved out to Seattle, I was unemployed for about 5 months. I had left a legal job in Boston, and so it was discouraging at times, but by waiting it out and waiting for the right job for me rather than taking the first legal position I could find, I think worked out much better and I'm much happier. I don't anticipate leaving my current job any time soon, or the foreseeable future. The willingness to wait and find the right job will end up paying dividends in the long run."

**6. *What are, or would be, the top 3 skills or characteristics you look for when hiring a new lawyer? Why are those so important to you?***

"The first one is the ability to be empathetic and interact with people. My job is heavily focused on interacting with and humanizing the most marginalized people in our society, who are often experiencing huge amounts of trauma just by interacting with the system. So by being able to empathize with people and really create an authentic relationship in those environments is incredibly important and challenging. I also think that being able to do that with court staff and prosecutors, people who are on the opposite side, is important both to maintain sanity and not be fighting all the time, and also to have a good relationship with people outside of your direct office.

Secondly, being able to clearly articulate what you're thinking and why, in a succinct way. Both in writing and when you're arguing in court – that's probably the most important thing, honestly. Judges are busy. They don't have time to read 15-20 page motions when you can say what you need to in five pages, still making a compelling argument.

Lastly, you just need to be really passionate about what you're doing because if you're not, it's going to come through in your work and it will suffer. Particularly for public-interest work and public defense. It can't be a 9-5 job; the people who succeed in this field and are incredibly good attorneys are incredibly passionate about it for several reasons. Everyone comes to these jobs for different reasons, but once you're here it can be all-consuming in a very positive way. And if you don't really believe in what you're doing, you're not going to be an effective attorney."

**7. *Any last words of advice for our students and recent grads?***

"Don't forget why you went to law school. I know a lot of people who went into it thinking that they wanted to do public-interest or social justice work, but then they hear about the [low] pay, how long the hours are and how hard it is to find jobs. You have to keep in mind that the jobs are out there. And if the reason you went to law school is to try to make the world a better place and to legitimately help people, you can't forget that. It's incredibly important and we need passionate people like that in this world."