

The Career Path Less Traveled - Part II

by Traci Ray
YLS Board Director

Last month Jim Miner and Mackenzie Hogan shared their stories about landing their current jobs, Jim as in-house counsel and Mackenzie as an associate attorney, using staffing agencies. This month, Yumi O'Neil, Supervisor of Judicial and Courtroom Clerks in the Multnomah County Circuit Court, and Sean Currie, an associate with Routh Crabtree Olsen PS, share their job seeking experiences with a focus on starting out in a non-attorney role. The theme from last month remains the same: finding employment as a young attorney



Yumi O'Neil

can take many different courses, and it is up to each individual to find a tactic that personally works

Yumi found her first job after law school in a seemingly traditional way. "I saw a posting for a judicial clerkship at Multnomah County Circuit Court, applied, and was called for an interview," she recollected. Although Yumi was not hired right away, her name was forwarded throughout the Court. "I was later hired as a temporary judicial clerk and worked for Judge Frank Bearden on a research project," Yumi related. "I was ultimately hired by Judge Marilyn Litzenger as her judicial clerk. And today, I supervise 40 judges' clerks, most of whom are lawyers." Replying to a posted job is common, and with a little patience, it worked out for Yumi.

However, she did have a few misconceptions about the opportunities she would find post-law school. Yumi stated, "I attended law school with the assumption that a law degree would open doors - not just in the legal profession, but also to non-legal positions."

Ultimately, Yumi learned that while to some extent her

degree helped, the usefulness of her juris doctorate largely depended on the industry she was seeking to join and the position that she was pursuing. "I realized that having a J.D. can be an initial hurdle because of the preconceptions that non-lawyers have about lawyers," she said. Being overqualified is a common issue attorneys face when seeking work outside of the legal community. Yumi overcame this obstacle by finding a job that was law-related, so her law degree was appreciated as a benefit.

Her advice to young lawyers who are looking for work is two-fold: "First, if you don't get selected for an interview or don't get hired after being interviewed, that does not mean that you've hit the end of the road with a particular firm or organization," Yumi conveyed. "There's always the possibility that your resume will be passed along to someone else in the organization or that you can be asked to interview for another position.

Second, I came across this perspective from Michael Melcher, a lawyer and career counselor, and I wholeheartedly agree with his viewpoint that sometimes our analytical skills and our tendency to question things may get in the way of our job search. When it comes to our career, we need to maintain an open mind to explore possibilities. With the current job market, it's even more important to be creative, strategic, and adopt an entrepreneurial mindset. Actively look for opportunities to solve problems and come up with solutions. In doing so, you will continue to learn, grow your skills, and develop your strengths to be a more attractive job candidate."

Sean Currie applied for several jobs out of law school. He drafted cover letters and sent out resumes, only to receive the "dreaded rejection letters" in return. Making little headway with the specific, traditional job hunting strategy of replying to job postings, Sean focused on networking. "I contacted Jesuit High School where I had graduated seven years before and asked them for a list of Portland area attorneys with whom I could meet," Sean recalled. "Jesuit obliged and I got a list of a hundred or so attorneys. I slowly called each of them and

asked if they would meet with a struggling young lawyer looking to start his career in Portland. With each attorney that gave me time, I would ask for other recommended contacts. Slowly, I met with over a hundred attorneys and gained a lot of good connections." Networking was an important piece of



Sean Currie

Sean's job search. He continued meeting people and, many networking lunches later, he found a firm that was willing to give him some contract work.

"I worked so hard on each project and the next day they would give me another one," Sean said. The firm invited Sean to use their library. "I practically set up shop right there," he reminisced. Sean continued to get contract projects, kept meeting with people around town and got involved with the MBA. Ultimately, Sean was hired by that firm and worked with them for almost three years.

"If I could give a new lawyer advice, I'd tell them that looking for a job, practicing law once you find that job, and just living life, are all about the same thing: building and maintaining relationships," Sean proffered. "That person who you meet with during an informational interview, at a bar function, or even on the street may end up being your opposing counsel, your client, your colleague, your mentor, your boss or even your friend. Aim to connect with people on a real level and not just as a stepping stone to something else. I mean, be honest, you are looking for a job. But you're also building connections."

Traci Ray is the Director of Marketing, Client Services & Events at Barran Liebman, an employment, labor & benefits law firm. She is the chair of the OSB's Pro Bono Committee, and a board member for the Multnomah Bar Association's Young Lawyers Section. Traci can be reached at tray@barran.com.



Lisa Lam Pro Bono Spotlight

by Craig Foster
Tonkon Torp

For some Oregon lawyers, helping the poor attain access to justice is not an occasional endeavor. It's their full-time job.

Meet Lisa Lam. A Portland native, Lisa attended the U of O for both her undergraduate and legal degrees. After graduating from law school in 2008 and clerking for the honorable Debra Vogt in Lane County, Lisa became a staff attorney at the Hillsboro office of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), an organization that works with other legal aid programs and private attorneys to provide free civil legal services to low-income individuals and families.

At the OLC, Lisa's practice touched a number of areas, but focused specifically on administrative and elder law. Lisa helped her clients obtain access to a number of state services such as unemployment benefits, disability benefits, food stamps and Medicaid. Lisa even helped clients get access to the care provided by assisted living facilities. Lisa particularly enjoyed working with seniors. She notes that low-income seniors can be especially vulnerable, and she found great satisfaction in experiencing how her legal help could empower them to face otherwise intimidating circumstances.

In 2011, Lisa began to help low-income Oregonians in a new way when she accepted her current position as the assistant director of the Campaign for Equal Justice (CEJ). Established



Lisa Lam

in 1991, CEJ develops and distributes resources to support the provision of legal aid services to low-income Oregonians all across the state. As assistant director, Lisa takes a lead role in CEJ's efforts. She coordinates volunteers, leads regional outreach and fundraising efforts, and conducts numerous speaking engagements. CEJ's education and fundraising efforts are now more critical than ever, since the economic downturn has led to serious funding cuts and decreased the availability of grants to support legal aid.

I asked Lisa why she believed lawyers should support pro bono work, either through financial support or the direct provision of legal services. She answers that ensuring that access to justice is provided without regard to financial resources is simply part of an attorney's professional obligation.

When she's not working, you might find Lisa reading, hiking or cheering on the Portland Trailblazers.



On Thursday, February 2, the YLS Membership Committee hosted a drop-in social in the back room of Paddy's Bar and Grill on SW Second and Yamhill. Despite the rain outside, the back room was crowded, warm and full of lively conversation. Members took the opportunity to escape their offices, munch on some nachos, catch up with friends and colleagues and meet some new ones. See more event photos at <http://www.mbar.org/YLS/YLSEvents.html>.

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Community Service Day
Saturday, March 31

The YLS Service to the Public Committee is participating in the bi-annual SOLV beach clean-up on Saturday, March 31 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Pacific City. For more information and to volunteer for the event contact Amanda Guile at aguile@batemansidel.com.