**Roadmap: A Practical Career Guide to Success**

by Laura Torchio

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Given the significant time and financial investment that comes with law school, along with the increasingly competitive legal job market, all law students should be asking themselves one question: what can I do during law school to position myself to find meaningful employment? Although the question may seem obvious, many law students are not asking it, and some law schools are not adequately preparing students to answer it.

Fortunately, for law students and law school professionals alike, an answer lies in Neil W. Hamilton’s book, *Roadmap: The Law Student’s Guide to Preparing and Implementing a Successful Plan for Meaningful Employment* (ABA, 2015). *Roadmap* is the product of significant legal market research across diverse legal employers to determine the top competencies valued in the workplace. With this data, Hamilton proposes a guide to help students develop and implement a plan to obtain meaningful employment. Hamilton then discusses practical ways students can develop these top competencies throughout law school and demonstrate them to employers. While at times *Roadmap* may be too data-heavy — perhaps losing readers in the statistics and engaging in seemingly tangential discussions — the information it provides is overwhelmingly valuable to both law school students and professionals.

In Section I, Hamilton surveys four sectors of legal employers in Minnesota, including legal aid offices, small firms, large firms, and county attorneys, to define the competencies valued most in the hiring decision. All employers agreed upon the following: trustworthiness, good judgment, initiative/work ethic, dedication to client service, commitment to others, and ability to work in a team. Through additional research, Hamilton demonstrates a second important point — that these competencies, among others, are similarly valued in business and, thus, transferable. These points are critical given the relatively stagnant nature of the legal market and the increase in business and law-related jobs.

Section II provides students with a tangible, six-part template to implement Hamilton’s *Roadmap*. Part one asks students to think about who they are, what makes them unique, and what value they bring to employers. In parts two and three, students assess their strongest professional competencies and identify and list areas of employment that fit their strengths. Evaluating the aforementioned, students clearly define what they can bring to their most promising employers in part four. Finally, parts five and six require students to strategize about how they will use their remaining time in law school to determine potential employment options and develop distinguishing competencies and evidence thereof — and how best to communicate their value proposition to employers.

*Roadmap* is not just a theoretical discussion of how students can plan a potentially gratifying legal career. It instead discusses practical ways students can develop differentiating competencies and provides detailed timelines, templates, assessments, and resources to help them implement their plan, making it an ideal book to use in newly popular law school professional development courses.

For instance, Section III explains practical ways students can develop and demonstrate differentiating competencies. Students can develop trustworthiness by assuming a leadership role in a student organization. Good judgment can be shown by seeking feedback from professors and communicating instances in which they learned from their mistakes. Non-legal jobs and hobbies such as waitressing, excelling at sports, and commitment to service work all demonstrate initiative. A biased favorite, and one that millennials in particular fail to understand, is that the important competency of dedication to clients can be developed from day one of law school by treating professors and law school administrators as their clients. This can easily be achieved by responding to emails, respecting deadlines, and arriving to appointments on time. Section III also explains how to implement the latter parts of the *Roadmap* through strategic networking, including the often overlooked, but valuable informational meeting. Borrowing from Marcia Ballinger and Nathan Perez, authors of *The 20-Minute Networking Meeting*, Hamilton does a fantastic job of explaining — step by step and minute by minute — how to conduct an effective informational meeting.

Overall, *Roadmap* is full of valuable information that, if followed, could put many law students on the path to more meaningful employment. However, given the high demands already placed on law students, it may be a bit naïve to think that many students will read this book, unless required to do so for a professional development course. To overcome this, I would highly recommend career and professional development counselors read *Roadmap* and incorporate its teachings into their counseling sessions with students. I have already done so and have received genuine gratitude from my students in return.