

pupils, to members of your Bar and to do so again when you become a full member. Considering the size of some Bars this may not be adequate. It is therefore important that you re-introduce yourself in the tearoom or common room until they can remember your name, not just your face. Counsel who want to pass a brief can only do so to people they know, and about whom they have formed an impression that they are capable of discharging their duties satisfactorily.


- Another crucial area to consider when coming to the Bar is what your expectations are. Many people assume that success is immediate. I wish to warn you that it is not so for the majority, especially for blacks and women. You must therefore consider the Bar as a long term investment. A sizeable practice, comprising of the areas of your particular interest will, in most cases, only emerge in your fifth year or so.
- The five-year investment in building a practice suggests that you must not

have immediate financial responsibilities beyond yourself. This is impossible for many people who come from the previously disadvantaged sectors of society. The expectations of the parents or relatives who struggled to put you through university expect that a profession as elite as the legal profession will yield a comfortable lifestyle immediately, and that self-sufficiency comes immediately.

- Blacks therefore continue to have a disadvantage of not having parents who will offer financial support in the first few years of practice when things don't go quite right. This has led to the Bars losing many black members with great potential because they cannot afford to sustain themselves and cater for their other responsibilities on what they are able to earn in the first five years of practice.
- Lastly I wish to warn ourselves against placing our aspirations for success at a level that is not achievable immediately. We must be conservative

in assuming financial commitments. I know it is most alluring to want to live immediately the lifestyle befitting of an advocate. Caution is called for here. I must say that I know of many junior members who are aware of these pitfalls and have not bought the latest BMW or Merc on the day they passed pupillage. This is a sign of wisdom.

I must conclude by saying that the legal profession and the love of the law could be the most fulfilling of all the professions. Once you have entered this profession you must make every effort and make all the necessary sacrifices to remain here.

The legal profession is not all about how much money you can make. It is a profession upon which democracy ultimately may depend. Without a vibrant legal profession and a legitimate judiciary, all the principles of democracy and the laudable norms of our society may end up with no guardian at all. 

Practice and the procedure of getting started: A rough guide

**Liz Law and Sean Geraghty
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The proverbial roller coaster ride of your life is about to begin! Strap yourself in, hold on tight but don't close your eyes.

This article is written from the perspective of two juniors who started practice, five and two years ago respectively, penniless, "careless" and feeling somewhat clueless. We've managed to stay on the roller coaster and are actually enjoying the ride. Our brief is to offer some practical advice to those who are about to set up practice.

Capital

The first thing you need is capital. If you do not have a benefactor in the form of a wealthy relative or partner,

you will need to form a good relationship with a bank. Find out which institutions are willing to assist new professionals at the beginning of their careers. An example is Standard Bank, which offers the pupil advocate loan. This is akin to a student loan with favourable rates of interest and flexible terms of repayment. Other junior colleagues have approached other institutions which have put together similar packages.

Be cautious of how you use the loan you obtain, since there will be months

when you will need to draw on this fund to pay the rent and meet living expenses.

Most people in practice will tell that there often are cash flow problems and when you are starting out you will find that your income is very erratic. It is therefore advisable to open a cheque account with an overdraft facility to enable you to meet your overheads in the lean months. However, keep your head about you in this regard, as banks are often prepared to offer you the world, which is very tempting to take when you have nothing. Keep your overdraft limit low and use it sparingly.

Simultaneously with putting your financial framework in place you will need to find and set up chambers. Don't over-extend yourself. Try to join a group which has a good spread of juniors and seniors - don't fall into the

trap of remaining in a group with too many juniors. The advice of more senior colleagues is something you will greatly rely on in your formative years (not to mention the odd pass-on). If permissible, serious consideration should be given to sharing chambers with another junior starting out as the savings can be enormous.

Chambers

Don't blow your entire pupil advocate loan on decorating your chambers: you will need it for those lean months ahead. Chambers need not be appointed like an Inn of Court. A diningroom table, for example, makes an excellent desk with lots of work space. Other bits of furniture can be reasonably obtained at auction houses. Size really doesn't count and, if going it alone, small, tastefully furnished chambers are all you need.

Books

Having organised chambers the next thing to consider is books. Opinions are divided amongst juniors, and the writers, as to whether or not it is essential to obtain a set of law reports. Law believes that it is essential. When burning the midnight oil in preparation for a matter the next day, there is nothing worse than finding that you desperately need to refer to a case which is not amongst the books you borrowed from the library or a colleague that afternoon. Sheer panic! Geraghty, however, has managed to get by for two years without a set, but this is probably because at any given time a third of Law's law reports can be found in Geraghty's Chambers. Many other juniors of our ilk have managed well without a set.

Ultimately it is a question of financial ability. The publishers do offer reasonable terms, and a host of other publications are available if you chose to go the electronic route. The law reports are the tools of our trade so consider using part of your pupil advocate loan to obtain a set. Whether you should get the reports in hard copy or invest in a computer is a matter of personal preference. An advantage of the latter is that you will be able to type your own pleadings and affidavits thereby saving on secretarial expenses.

What you should not hesitate to purchase at once, however, is a copy of a major work on High Court practice. After having gone through pupillage you will know that it is indispensable. Similarly a major work on magistrates' court practice is a valuable publication. A number of juniors will do a lot of *pro deo* work when they start out so a copy of a work on the Criminal Procedure Act is also a good acquisition.

Having organised your finances and chambers best you get to work. If your pigeonhole is not clogged with briefs put your name on the legal aid roster. Although it may take eons to get paid for the work you do, an immediate dividend is court experience and exposure to other practitioners. It is also a good service to the community.


Although you may be living on borrowed money know that the taxman cometh. As much as it may irk you, register with the Receiver of Revenue. A number of juniors tend to overlook this nasty little detail and wake up to the headache of penalties and arrear

payments two or three years down the line. Bite the bullet for there is nowhere to hide.

Luxuries

A golden rule: don't get caught up in the luxury car = success = competence delusion. What you need is transport and not a status symbol. The writers both sat with their briefcases on their knees in buses and taxis during the early months. This may be frowned upon by some of your colleagues as not befitting an advocate, but remember you ought to be judged by your ability and not your mode of transport. Bear in mind that in the early days of your practice your income is erratic and financing a vehicle is an on-going monthly commitment which you may struggle to meet initially. Bide your time and when you do buy a car go for one of the smaller models or consider buying a classic model which stands outside the car-status dynamic. Furthermore, the savings you make in buying a smaller car can be applied to establishing a library which will equip you well to do your job once you've got to chambers.

It is strongly recommended that you take out income protection cover and some form of medical insurance. The Professional Provident Society (PPS) offers a range of schemes with reasonable premiums, but it is worth shopping around.

The roller coaster of practice is a long and sometimes scary ride, but as long as you don't derail you'll find it very rewarding. 

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