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The Profession of Law

To ensure that every American was protected from indecent acts, our founding fathers set up a system of laws. These laws have been studied by many men and women throughout history. The profession of these studies of law is that of an attorney. This is the profession that I hope to pursue after I graduate from high school. An attorney, or lawyer, is known for upholding the highest standards of our country's laws. This is the appeal that draws me to the law profession. I want to help uphold the rights that every American citizen is granted. To see how this action was performed, I shadowed a county judge named Alan Hertzberg. Judge Hertzberg is a Family Court Judge in the Allegheny County court district. While I was at the county courthouse, I saw Judge Hertzberg read over his cases for the day. This helped him prepare for his court cases for the day. In the afternoon, I was allowed to sit in on four of the cases Judge Hertzberg presided over. From this experience, I saw the law from behind the bench rather than in front of it.

The law profession can be traced back to the earliest days of human conflict. "In any society persons can be expected to act primarily for their own interests, with friction and conflict resulting from the competition of various self-interests. To restrain such friction and conflict within tolerable limits, rules for the control of people have been essential from the very dawn of civilization, rules which set the framework or pattern within which all human activity is carried on" (Bagby 2). This passage shows the true essence of law. Upholding the law is something that is a necessity to any functioning system of government. From the days of tribal councils, there

have been people who have chosen to uphold these laws and protect those who are abused by them. In today's society, the laws and regulations are much more complex than those of tribal days. Today, a lawyer must be knowledgeable of all the country's laws. There are many different fields of law; each of them has its own set of rules and regulations. For nearly all forms of law, the lawyer must meet with their client and discuss the case. This is when the lawyer forms his or her case for their client. The case may be as simple as a will, or as complex as a murder case. After they form their case, the lawyer must present their case in front of a judge in a pre-trial motion. This will eliminate any discrepancies in the case before it goes to court. The judge will also set a date for the trial at this time. As a final procedure, the judge will determine if the case will be held in front of a jury or one judge. After all of these motions, the lawyer will continue to work on his case until the trial date arrives. When the trial date does arrive, the lawyer will proceed into the court room with their client and present the case to the judge and jury. In their case, they must have an opening statement, direct and cross examinations, and a closing statement. All of these components play an important role in the trial procedure. After all of these components are presented from both sides, the jury or judge will go into deliberation. The time that the deliberation takes generally depends on the level of seriousness surrounding the case. For example, a murder case deliberation will generally take much longer than a burglary case would. When the jury or judge returns from deliberations, they will announce their verdict. No matter what the verdict is, the lawyer's job is not over. Unless the verdict is an acquittal, both lawyers must return at a later date for the sentencing. At the sentencing, both lawyers will argue for a period of time in which their client will serve in a prison to be named. Even after this procedure, a trial may not be necessarily over. If there was a carriage of injustice in a client's case, they have the right to an appeal. The appeals process is one that has many various levels

and rules. Most cases do appeal to the appellate court. This court reviews the case and, if they find the case was conducted in an unfair or unjust manner, it allows the case to go back to court for a retrial. These are the basic procedures that a lawyer performs for their clients.

A lawyer's working conditions are some of the most sporadic and unpredictable of any profession. Lawyers, on average, can be expected to work fifty or more hours a week (Proquantum 2). This means that lawyers will put in more time over a weeklong period than nearly any other job. Their devotion can be seen in all aspects of their job. Aside from the long hours they put in, lawyers also have to be very flexible with their hours. If a client can only meet with their lawyer on a Saturday or Sunday, then the lawyer will have to meet with them. This leaves little wiggle room for a lawyer to set certain office hours. A lawyer can work in three general types of offices. One of these offices is a small hometown office run by a handful of lawyers who generally do all kinds of law. These lawyers usually do divorce, real estate, family, and other small branches of law. They usually have set office hours and only meet with clients on a regular basis. The second type of work environment is a district attorney's office. This building can usually be found in a downtown setting in larger cities. The district attorney and his or her workers generally have set work hours when they meet with clients and discuss the case. They may stay after or come in early to research their case or do other work. The district attorney's building is generally a large multi-story building with various offices and cubicles. The third and final setting that a lawyer may work in is a large corporate firm. This firm is generally set in a large city. The hours for the firm are set, but the workers are generally at the firm at all hours of the day. The building is generally a multi-story building with many offices and cubicles. These firms are usually run by a small handful of partners who only take the cases that will make the most money. The setting of the firm is generally very business-like and matter

of fact. At each of these settings, it is important for workers to interact with their co-workers. “Talking with other people in my firm helped me to integrate myself more quickly into the firm. After a while, my one coworker and I talked about it and we decided to open our own small firm. After that, we just found a small place in Elizabeth and went from there” (Chomas). This quote from a local lawyer, Lou Chomas, shows the importance of interaction with coworkers. By talking with his coworkers and forming a friendship, he opened up options that would not have been previously available to him. A lawyer generally spends a great deal of time with his coworkers. In some cases, a lawyer must tackle a case with one of his coworkers. A lawyer has very unique circumstances when dealing with their everyday work environment.

Before a lawyer can practice their first case, they must obtain their law degree. To do this, they must attend a four year college and a three year law school. If a prospective lawyer is looking at colleges, they should consider Duquesne law school. This school is ranked 30th in the nation for top law schools. Located in downtown Pittsburgh, Duquesne Law School is also a university. To apply to Duquesne University (not the law school), they must have a high class rank and a good SAT score. Once they are in Duquesne, they must maintain a high GPA to be able to apply to law school. If they do maintain a high GPA, they will be able to take the LSAT test their senior year. To get into Duquesne Law School, they must achieve a very high score on their LSAT. Upon doing this, the prospective lawyer may apply to Duquesne Law School. Duquesne only accepts 120 law students a year, so the applicant must act quickly. Another prominent law school in the Pittsburgh area is the University of Pittsburgh. To get into the University of Pittsburgh you must have average grades and a decent SAT score. The undergraduate requirements for Pitt are not as vicious as those of Duquesne. During their time getting an undergraduate degree, the student must still maintain a high GPA. During their senior

year of college, the student must take the LSAT test. If their scores are high enough, they can apply to the University of Pittsburgh Law School. One of their requirements is three letters of recommendations from various college professors (University of Pittsburgh 8). This is a unique requirement for admissions into law school. Because the University of Pittsburgh is a larger college, they accept more applicants. This does not mean that the standards for entrance are any less rigorous though. Like any other major, an undergraduate degree takes four years. There is no preferred undergraduate degree, but one with roots in English is generally preferred. Once a student is in law school though, he is on the path to become a lawyer. In the first year of law school, the student will study torts, civil procedure, contracts, property, constitutional law, and most likely some criminal law. With the exception of the criminal law, the first year of studies is directed towards business law. This field can become a career field for some lawyers after law school. The second year of law school is considered the hardest year of law school. In this year, the student will tackle some of the toughest concepts in law. Some of these courses include constitutional law, administrative law, real property law, and evidence. These elements are some of the most commonly used in the judicial system. Once their student has completed their first two years of law school, they enter their final year. The final year of law school is more like a job training experience. In their final year, students dissect cases and find arguments that could be discussed. This is the year that students also try to get internships that will lead to future jobs. Due to the lack of new information taught in the final year of law school, many students become bored and drop out when they are only a year away from their dream. Once all three years of schooling are completed, the student will graduate with their law degree. The average cost of a three year law school is roughly \$100,000. This cost can be cut considerably though when the scores of the LSAT and the undergraduate grades come into play. There are also some

scholarships that can help pay for a student's law school costs. Some of these scholarships include the Jack Rent Cook Foundation, ABA Legal Opportunity Scholarships, and the Paul and Daisy Soros Foundation. All of these scholarships help students pay for law school. The Jack Rent Cook Foundation can provide any graduate student with \$50,000 a year for up to six years (Cook 2). This scholarship can virtually pay for all of a student's law school expenses. Another helpful scholarship is the ABA Legal Opportunity Scholarship. This scholarship provides students in need with \$15,000 over their three year law school period (American Bar Association 4). While this is not as much money as the Jack Rent Cook Foundation, it can still help many students with their expenses.

Aside from an undergraduate degree and a law degree, what personal characteristics does a lawyer need to be a lawyer? One of the main characteristics a lawyer needs to be successful is a strong, domineering personality. If a lawyer cannot take control of a courtroom, they will not win their case. A lawyer must also be a very good public speaker. If they cannot express their thoughts and ideas to a judge and jury, they will not be successful in representing their client. "I find that it is much more...appealing to listen to a lawyer that is a good speaker, rather than one who is fumbling with his notes and cannot speak clearly" (Hertzberg). This quote from the Honorable Judge Alan Hertzberg shows the importance that public speaking makes on a judge. If a lawyer cannot sustain the judge and jury's attention, they will drift away and forget the case at hand. This leads to another important quality of a lawyer. No matter how large or small the case is, a lawyer must always be dressed in a professional manner. In all cases, a lawyer (male or female) should be dressed in a suit of some sort. If a lawyer came into a court room in khakis and polo, they would be ejected from the courtroom. Their disrespect towards their client, the judge, and the jury can be seen in their appearance. A well dressed person also gives off a sense of

importance and knowledge. A lawyer must possess a number of special skills if they wish to be successful. One of the most important skills is the ability to present a case. If a lawyer cannot present a solid case to the judge and jury, then he will certainly fail. A lawyer must also be a strong writer. While evidence will play a large part in the meat of the case, opening and closing arguments are just as important. These arguments are introductions and conclusions to a case that a lawyer writes to sway the jury's opinion. A strong closing argument can make or break the deal for the jury. If a lawyer cannot write a convincing closing argument, they can easily lose a case. A final skill a lawyer must possess is the ability to think on their feet. In court, there are many instances when opposing counsel (the other lawyer) will make an objection. A lawyer must be able to form the objection and respond to the objection. If they cannot, their opponent will have the upper hand in the examination phase of the case. This is also an important asset to a lawyer when they need to change their closing argument on the spot. All of these factors play an important part in the personal qualifications of being a lawyer.

Once a law student is adequately prepared for the road ahead of them, they must seek out a job. Most of the jobs that young lawyers begin at start out at roughly \$50,000. As their seniority in a firm grows, so does their salary. In the next four years, an average employee can expect a raise of roughly \$10,000. If the lawyer stays with the same firm, they can expect a \$20,000 raise every five to ten years. This means that in twenty years, a lawyer's salary can more than double (PayScale). There are many of these job opportunities in the local area of Pittsburgh. There is a large branch of the Edgar Snyder law firm in the area. Aside from this large firm, there are many smaller and medium sized firms in the area. Some of these firms specialize in certain types of law (business, personal, real estate, etc.) while others do all types of law. In downtown Pittsburgh, there is the district attorney's office. This establishment provides jobs for many

young lawyers who need job experience. It is also a good foothold for lawyers who are trying to work their way into politics. Once a lawyer has a job, they must look towards career advancement. By winning their cases, putting in long hours at the office, and providing exceptional service to their clients. Making their mark on their firm is essential to their advancement. As they move up the ladder of success, their salary increases. This provides even more of an incentive for the prospective lawyer to perform well. If a lawyer does not want to become an even more powerful lawyer, there are a few career paths they can peruse. Like my mentor, Judge Alan Hertzberg, a lawyer can choose to become a judge. "I knew when I started studying law that I wanted to be behind the bench and not in front of it. So when I got out of school and passed the bar exam, I started looking for ways to become a judge" (Hertzberg). This quote shows that not all law students aspire to become lawyers. Some want to pursue a career in the judicial side of law, rather than being a lawyer. Another popular career path that lawyers can pursue is a career in politics. Many lawyers, especially lawyers working in the district attorney's office, go on to become politicians. Their knowledge of the law helps them to understand the rules of politics. Lawyers also possess the ability to influence people with their speaking abilities. If none of these options are attractive to a graduated law student, they can also pursue a career in teaching. If a law student goes back and gets their master's degree, they can teach law classes at a university. Considering all of these options, a graduating law student has a wealth of options ahead of them when they pass the bar exam.

"The life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience" (Holmes 5). This quote shows one of the main points I have learned in my research and shadowing experience. Despite this, I feel that I still want to pursue a career in law. If I do decide to become a lawyer when I graduate high school, I will not have to make any radical life changes. I already have strong

skills and a strong background in writing and public speaking. I am also a very driven person, and would therefore quickly climb up the ladder in any law firm. After doing all of my research, I have decided that I will continue to pursue a career in law. I strongly feel that I would excel and achieve great things in this career field. If anything, my research has enhanced my interest in the law profession. My shadowing experiences have shown me aspects of the law profession that I have not seen before. Judge Hertzberg's cases allowed me to see the practice of family and personal law. This experience has helped to steer me in a different direction in the law field. My conclusion from my shadowing experience is that I want to be an active member of either a criminal lawyer or a member of a large company's law staff. These settings would let me excel in the law profession. Based on my research, personal experience, and first hand knowledge, I feel that I will continue to pursue a career in law.

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