

Life as an associate

The role of the associate is probably one of the most coveted, yet ridiculed positions within the legal community. For new lawyers, landing an associate position out of law school means regular paychecks and a long term relationship with their student loan agency. Current associates tend to describe the position in terms of billable hours, grunt work and a road to partnership status. Whichever perspective you choose to take, the life of an associate is busy and involved, but it can also prove incredibly rewarding.

Meetings, meetings, and more meetings

In many firms, associates work on a number of matters simultaneously, which requires substantial amounts of communication. A single day may include intake consultations, client meetings, staff lunches or counsel from partners. Meetings are an unavoidable, and sometimes maddening, part of the associate's day.

Supporting the Partners

Associates provide partners with extensive assistance. In some firms, junior associates do not even have their own clients. Instead, they solely work to support the needs of the partners. Assigned tasks may include:

- Researching cases
- Completing discovery
- Drafting documents, motions and briefs
- Client communications

Billing

Associates and billable hours...two concepts that tend to go hand in hand. Billable hour requirements are a constant reminder of work, which can be extremely stressful for some associates. Fortunately, many law firms are transitioning to flat billing alternatives, which can alleviate some of the pressure. But associates are continuously tasked with the responsibility of bringing profits into the firm. This means a lot of time spent on billable tasks and some serious attention to accurate time tracking.

Positioning

One of the most attractive qualities of an associate position is the potential for advancement. Most associates are looking to make partner one day, so they work to position themselves for the opportunity. This means making their billable hours quota (exceeding it is even better), developing professional relationships with partners and bringing new business into the firm. The partnership track is paved with successes, initiative and leadership potential. Associates must work hard to get on board.

Compensation

According to Payscale, the average pay for a law firm associate is about \$80,000 annually. Of course, this can vary greatly, depending on the size and revenue of the firm. But it's a good indication of what law firm associates earn on average.

Associates and grunt work unfortunately go hand in hand sometimes. But these positions are the engine of the law firm. They also provide new attorneys with real real world employment and give existing attorneys a shot at the ever-coveted partnership.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a Virginia based writer with a passion for all things legal. As a former domestic relations attorney, she understands the challenge of determining the best fee structure for your practice. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.