





# THE SUPPORTING CAST

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In an uncertain economy, GW Law's career services help job seekers reach their goals

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— BY ARI KAPLAN, JD '97 —

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**E**wadele Butler earned a 3.1 grade point average her first semester at GW Law and uneventfully completed the remainder of her first year without making a journal or Moot Court. She gave birth to her now 21-month-old daughter in August 2007 and withdrew from school the following fall semester. Hers was not the model background for on-campus interviewing success; she ultimately received only four interviews and no offers for the summer of 2008.

With a renewed vigor, Butler, who was an actress on shows such as *Sex and the City* and *The Wire* before pursuing her legal education, returned to school in spring 2008 and earned a 3.9 GPA. She also received individual training from the school to hone her interviewing skills, perfect her storytelling ability, and prepare more thoroughly. Her efforts paid handsome dividends that fall in the form of 25 interviews, 15 call-backs, and five offers.

Now a summer associate in New York City with Hogan & Hartson, which she chose for its entertainment transaction practice and collegial culture, the 3L credits the advice that she received from career counselor Michelle Richards, and the other members of the Career Development Office, with her transformation and success in the most difficult market for law students in recent memory. "I know I wouldn't have the summer position if not for their advice and help," says Butler, who will graduate in December.



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CAROLE MONTGOMERY, *director of GW Law’s Career Development Office*

Long before Black Thursday and the 10,000-plus layoffs in the first half of 2009, Carole Montgomery, director of GW Law’s Career Development Office, and her team began offering additional programming to help students navigate the faltering economy. In addition, early in the year, “It became clear that a lot of law firms are deferring starting times for their new associates,” says Thomas Morrison, senior associate dean for administrative affairs.

This unprecedented drain on the demand for legal talent has prompted students like Butler to refocus on critical job searching and networking skills. She suggests that students and alumni start to navigate employment challenges by visiting the CDO.

## ★ Take Advantage of Career Resources

Butler meets with Richards regularly and notes, “I am there all the time and always learn something.

“Let go of the fear,” she adds.

To accommodate the new visitation patterns, the office has expanded its hours, opening at 8:30 a.m. and closing at 6:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday. On Friday, counselors, all of whom are experienced and licensed attorneys who come from every employment sector, are available 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but many answer student e-mail queries at home in the evening, Montgomery says. “We have stretched our resources to make sure that students know we are here, and if we have to work around their schedules, we can do it,” she adds.

Montgomery emphasizes that students and recent graduates are facing a virtual perfect storm of employment uncertainty. First, deferred associates are competing with those who remain unemployed for outstanding positions. Second, the change in administration is delaying hiring for many legal positions. Third, the economic downturn has forced certain organizations to eliminate positions or delay their creation until later in the year. “This is my third recession, and although it is worse than the others, it will pass,” Montgomery advises. Her team is combating the climate by conveying the message that, “You have good marketable skills; let’s get them out there.”

In a typical year, the Law School would have scheduled practice-specific programs, such as an IP or insurance law panel. This year, however, the career office supplemented those programs with outside speakers capable of teaching students how to recession-proof their jobs.

During the 2008-09 school year, Montgomery helped the GW Law community with its visibility efforts by inviting law firm and government recruiters on campus, including those from the Department of Justice, the Department of State, and the District of Columbia, to share their insight. They advised students on techniques for encouraging organizations to invite them for interviews, helped review their resumes, and identified specific qualities that employers are seeking. She also conducted a town hall meeting with 3Ls or 4L-evening students and offered supplemental guidance to students navigating the deferral process.

While some firms are offering them a stipend during the deferral period if they perform public service, some are simply deferring outright. To assist with this effort, there is a new resource guide for deferred associates seeking public interest jobs and an enhanced Web-based tool on the careers site dedicated to deferred 3Ls and 4LEs. “Everyone in the Law School, including the faculty, the administration, and the staff, is stepping up to the plate to assist any student seeking employment or interested in navigating a deferment,” Montgomery says.

Faculty members are enabling graduates to serve as more sophisticated research fellows. These positions will offer greater responsibility and provide continuity in research and writing. The school is committed to giving graduates substantive work experience that will enhance their marketability. “We are looking for creative ways for our students to have legal experience on their resume and to actually keep their skills sharp,” Montgomery adds.

In that effort, Dean Frederick M. Lawrence approached the Alumni Deans Advisory Board, composed of senior law firm partners, among others, to encourage their deferred associates to enroll in one of GW’s LLM programs to provide additional skills. “The goal is to take the time that the individual is spending in a hiatus period and provide them with a broader background that makes them a better candidate when the market recovers,” Morrison says.

## ★ Meet Alumni

The dean's contact with his alumni board is a model that individuals should adopt, particularly in the current market. GW Law has more than 23,000 living alumni around the world. Richard D. Heideman, JD '72, a prominent Washington, D.C., litigator with Heideman Nudelman & Kalik, which he founded in 1973, has long employed GW Law student clerks. He served as the president of the GW Law School Alumni Association for two years and is developing a GW Law Mentorship Program with Lawrence to help link GW Law graduates who need hands-on experience with alumni who can provide mentorship. Graduates working with Heideman, for example, might assist with the preparation of a deposition, conduct background investigations, prepare research memorandums, and participate in strategic case analysis meetings on behalf of firm clients. "Even if it does not lead to a future position, it would give these individuals experience and better position them for success in their careers."

Licensed to practice in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Kentucky, Indiana, and Wyoming, Heideman has served on the faculty of the National College of Criminal Defense Lawyers, is a registered lobbyist with the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives on behalf of American Victims of Terrorism, and has had a trial broadcast live on CourtTV. He was the president of B'nai B'rith International from 1998 to 2002 and has served as a delegate to various United Nations conferences, including as head of delegation to the U.N. World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, and the recent U.N. Durban Review Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. As an activist attorney involved in community affairs, he is an ideal example of the alumni resources available to students and graduates of the Law School.

## ★ Networking Works

With employers receiving an unparalleled number of resumes, they are rarely evaluating those with whom they do not have a connection. As such, "networking is absolutely critical in this market," Montgomery says. And she knows something about critical networking.

A 1983 graduate of the University of Tulsa College of Law, Montgomery, who practiced for 16 years, successfully overcame employment challenges as a newly licensed female attorney in Oklahoma. She spent two years in the litigation division of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. in Tulsa followed by six years as the director of legal services for a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development loan program. At the FDIC, she was responsible for approving law firms to work with the agency and helped many lawyers navigate the approval process.

One of those lawyers was a law school classmate, and when she was searching for a position with a private firm, that classmate, with whom she kept in touch, connected Montgomery to his supervisor. The job was hers. "Somewhere down the line, the people with whom you are making contacts are going to help you," she says, and she encourages students to begin maintaining contacts in their first year. "No matter whom you speak with, you always need to think toward the future," she adds.

Montgomery emphasizes the importance of thinking long term. Every action a student or recent graduate takes is a building block, she emphasizes. It may not impact one's immediate future, but it will certainly affect the course of a career. It is essential for students and new lawyers to position themselves to gain the legal skills they need to ensure optimal positioning as they migrate to different firms or organizations.

Montgomery's first job was the result of introducing herself to strangers and starting conversations while working on a judicial campaign. "Something will come to fruition for those who are being proactive," she says.

## ★ Attend Career Fairs

Like Montgomery, Butler took the advice of her career advisers and began striking up conversations at career fairs in spring 2008 to find a summer position that year. Following the first event she attended, the U.S. Attorneys Office in Washington, D.C., offered her an unpaid (though credit-worthy) position as a law clerk. "I don't know if I would've had that job last summer without their advice and help," Butler says.

Job seekers have a variety of career fair options throughout the school year and particularly during the summer. They are



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offered nationwide by nonprofit organizations, bar associations, and law schools, among others. Events outside of areas of high lawyer concentration may bear more fruit. For that reason, Montgomery encourages students and alumni to be as geographically flexible as possible and to expand their practice area interests.

Butler, for example, commutes weekly between New York City and Washington, D.C. She is also looking forward to gaining exposure to a diverse palette of practices in addition to her primary interest in entertainment law, including patent litigation, white-collar defense, and corporate transactions.

That said, Heideman encourages students and alumni to have reasons for selecting certain geographic areas. Butler can easily explain why she could work in New York or Washington, D.C., given the proximity, but another pair of cities might be more difficult to explain. "Somebody who says they'll live and work anywhere will not make it in the current environment because, in competing for jobs, one must present a strong, focused image to the prospective employer that you know who you are and where you want to go, both in life and in your career."

nities for law clerkships, internships, and associate positions with the goal of securing practical law firm experience for every single graduate regardless of their actual employment status. "Our hope is that in the long term, every grad of GW Law School in need of support will receive mentorship, resume building opportunities, advice, and hands-on experience," he says.

It all begins, however, by mastering the fundamentals.

## ★ Tell Your Story

Butler spent four years as an information security engineer on encryption at a federally-funded research and development center in Virginia. Despite her master's degree in computer science and promising technical career, she spent the next two and a half years pursuing her passion for acting. She appeared in projects ranging from an independent film in Washington, D.C., to television extra work in Los Angeles.

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During Heideman's tenure as Alumni Association president, his goal was to consistently help the next generation of lawyers become better linked to the GW Law alumni network across the globe. He focused on ways to connect the school's graduates together and further develop the institution as a provider of resources for them.

Heideman applauds Lawrence, whom he describes as "a brilliant leader with a vision for the Law School that is dynamic," for his outreach to alumni throughout the world, including at periodic American Bar Association meetings for social events and practice development workshops. During his presidency, Heideman created "GW Law Day," which held an inaugural symposium on "The Holocaust and the Law" at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. The association also sponsored an admission ceremony at the Supreme Court for alumni.

In the current down market, the GW Law Mentorship Program seeks to identify ways that unemployed graduates can take direct advantage of the alumni network to create opportu-

at least six different occasions. Ultimately, Richards encouraged Butler to include her acting experience on the CV. "That experience sparked a rapport in every interview, which benefited me," Butler says.

To maximize every benefit, Heideman urges students to prepare an answer to the question: What area of the law interests you the most? He recently met with a 2009 graduate who answered "immigration law." Within minutes, he had contacted colleagues in that area and helped the student arrange follow-up meetings that have led to a list of 20 potential contacts.

The key to maximizing those opportunities is for individuals to determine what interests them the most. They should then try to develop presentable skills in that particular area. "If they want immigration law, they should highlight in their resume what it is that gives them that interest, then contact every small and large firm, and relevant in-house legal department in the geographic area where they wish to live, and seek short meetings to discuss opportunities," Heideman advises.

Butler, an actress, computer scientist, mother, and future lawyer, needed to combine her qualities and weave them into a compelling story for prospective employers. The CDO advised her to tell them a story about how her unique background was well suited to the position for which she was applying. For example, for patent-related positions, Butler would advise interviewers that her interest in film and entertainment is directly related to sophisticated intellectual property since there are substantial disputes related to the transmission of creative works online. "I always have a story when I walk into an interview," she says.

If you are lacking in your GPA, Butler suggests looking to the CDO for inside information to tailor your story to the firm's specific needs. Look at the firm's Web site and other resources online to identify specific needs and interests. Use group activities or affiliations to pique their interest. "Have a story of how it all ties together," she says.


Preparation will impact that story. Butler studied the backgrounds of the lawyers with whom she met but failed to review the firm's Web site to identify current news and events for purposes of conversation. Her career counselors taught her to review more broadly for general topics rather than individual background only.

She also participated in two mock interviews at the career office in spring 2008 to prepare for the fall. "The kinds of things they taught me in the mock interview included expressing enthusiasm for the specific position under consideration rather than simply the law."

And, of course, be positive. "One of the mistakes I was making in my mock interviews was referring to past experience in a negative way," Butler says. Take the experience you have naturally and talk about what you love. Her career counselor urged her to stay positive, be enthusiastic, and preserve her true personality.

That advice is essential in an environment of historically high unemployment. Heideman encourages students to "stand up, be proud, be straightforward, and concentrate on their strengths." Those who decide what they like the most and adopt the idea to "do what you do best" can tailor their presentation according to their vision for the future. "That strategy will pay both short-and long-term dividends," he says.


These considerations will also help students and alumni identify the type of work environment in which they can expect to thrive. The down economy poses a number of challenges, but it also offers additional time for self-reflection and evaluation. Career guidance can set the stage for any law student's promising career, and GW Law's Career Development Office provides the supporting cast to ensure its students reach their goals. Those who take advantage of that time by meeting colleagues, peers, and potential mentors through these means will reap the benefits of their effort.

"Create a vision of what you would like to do with your life," Heideman says, "and then go for it." 

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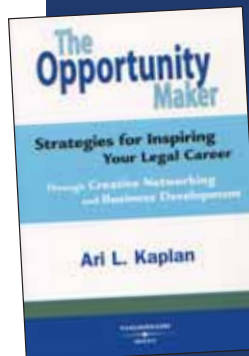
## Make Your Own Opportunities



Ari Kaplan, JD '97, is author of *The Opportunity Maker: Strategies for Inspiring Your Legal Career Through Creative Networking and Business Development* (Thomson-West, 2008), which details how law students and legal professionals can stand out in today's stagnant economy. He conducted more than 100 interviews for his book and has identified a number of activities that allow individuals to distinguish themselves in a downturn. Here are a few steps Kaplan says can organically raise your profile.

### GET PUBLISHED

Opportunity makers use writing as a chance to enhance their career and business development potential. Your published work will serve as a vehicle to establish your expertise, expand your network, and spotlight the efforts of others. It will also offer a tangible representation of your ability to counsel employers, clients, and prospects.



### REPURPOSE CONTENT

Take that article you just wrote and create an audio program from the text (visit [Alkaps.AudioAcrobat.com](http://Alkaps.AudioAcrobat.com) for details). Film a video CLE program on the same topic, using the

article as an outline (visit [Lawline.com](http://Lawline.com) for examples).

### BROADLY BROADCAST

As you create content, share it via LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Legal OnRamp, and JDSupra. Doing so will increase your exposure and consistently remind your network of your ability. It will also reflect your character of commitment to the profession and specific practice areas.

### COLLABORATE

A key technique of great opportunity makers is to work with another individual or a team in order to enhance the collective chance for success. Those who achieve their goals often do so because they hold themselves accountable to others. As a result, find ways to celebrate your peers and those throughout the community.

### SPECIALIZE

Successful professionals often understand that specialization is the key to remaining present in the minds of a target audience. It allows you to more effectively tailor the articles you are writing, the audio programs that you are producing, and the people with whom you are trying to connect. It also aligns your overall reputation with your online Google-ability.

In a struggling market, professionals are often more inclined to connect with one another because of the universal search for opportunity. By engaging in one of these proven strategies for establishing and strengthening relationships, you are more likely to realize your goals.