

LAW WEEK

COLORADO

IAALS Identifies Skills That Make a Whole Lawyer

Character found to be more important than legal skills for new lawyers

BY TONY FLESOR
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While future lawyers around the country sat for the bar exam, the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System pushed out its new guidance for the measure of a successful lawyer.

The organization on July 26 issued its latest report, “Foundations for Practice: The Whole Lawyer and the Character Quotient,” which outlines the qualities lawyers need in order to find success in the profession. The findings were built with the help of 24,000 lawyers across practices and all 50 states who were surveyed for the project, which began in 2014. The project was completed through IAALS’ Educating Tomorrow’s Lawyers, and the complete results are available through the project’s website.

IAALS’ report identified several keys to success: a high “character quotient” — which includes characteristics such as integrity, work ethic, grit and common sense — along with professional competencies and strong legal skills. In short, new lawyers hoping to find success in the modern legal world should look to develop the whole package.

“Just as the medical profession realized that ‘bedside manner’ matters in

teach and how employers hire and motivate a different approach to educating, training and employing America’s next generation of lawyers.”

According to IAALS, law graduates entered the profession with the required education to become lawyers, 40 percent of graduates do not find full-time jobs that require a law license and 23 percent of practicing lawyers believe new lawyers have the appropriate skills to succeed, according to the IAALS report.

According to the report, when new lawyers enter the workforce unprepared or under-prepared, it undermines the public trust in the legal system.

IAALS’ findings can address the gaps in legal education by giving law schools a roadmap for how to prepare lawyers and to help legal employers identify better ways to hire new lawyers, according to Rew Goodenow, a lawyer with Parsons Behle & Latimer who served as president of the National Conference of Bar Presidents.

The report also spotlights the legal profession itself for its role in directing legal education and perpetuating the current system. “When they fail to hire entry-level lawyers based on the skills, professional competencies and characteristics they desire, and hire instead on



professionalism but are not specifically addressed in legal education. Character quotient falls in line with IQ and emotional intelligence and reflects things like integrity, worth ethic, common sense and resilience.

Character quotient skills, overall, were identified by survey respondents as more important than legal skills. In fact, 40 percent of identified legal skills were regarded by respondents as neces-

sary passion and ambition to be necessary right out of law school.

Also, perhaps most notably, nine out of 10 respondents found all identified stress and crisis management skills to be necessary to lawyers either immediately out of law school or to be acquired over time. These include coping with stress, exhibiting flexibility and resilience, making decisions and delivering results under pressure, and reacting calmly and steadily in challenging situations.

The survey was built with a list of foundations that were identified through literature review, seeking guidance from experts and brainstorming. Each of the foundations that respondents were asked to identify as necessary were identified in the context of each individual’s specific type of organization, legal specialty or department.

The survey was disseminated through bar associations in 37 states, and it reached 780,694 attorneys to return a total 24,137 responses.

The report is the first in a series. According to IAALS, law schools across the country are now talking about what the learning outcomes should be and how to develop and measure them. Legal employers are likewise discussing how to turn those outcomes into tangible hiring criteria and revising their hiring practices accordingly. The data from IAALS’ Foundations for Practice project will be the focus of a conference at IAALS in September. •

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“JUST AS THE MEDICAL PROFESSION REALIZED THAT ‘BEDSIDE MANNER’ MATTERS IN A DOCTOR, IAALS’S RESEARCH REVEALS THAT BEING A ‘WHOLE LAWYER’ MEANS POSSESSING A HIGH CHARACTER QUOTIENT IN ADDITION TO HAVING SKILLS AND INTELLECT.”

Alli Gerkman, director of IAALS’ Educating Tomorrow’s Lawyers Initiative

a doctor, IAALS’ research reveals that being a ‘whole lawyer’ means possessing a high character quotient in addition to having skills and intellect,” Alli Gerkman, director of IAALS Educating Tomorrow’s Lawyers Initiative, said in a press release. “Our findings in this study have the power to radically shift the discussion about what law schools

traditional criteria ... they create incentives that are misaligned with the objectives toward which we all must work.

The main focus of the results are on character quotient skills and professional competencies, such as listening attentively, communicating clearly and being on time, which are currently recognized as important components of

sary immediately out of law school. Almost all legal skills, however, were seen as something that would be acquired over time.

Other significant skills included the ability to retain existing business, to listen and respond promptly to communications and to treat others with courtesy and respect. Also, respondents found