

Your law firm employability takeaway

The Future Lawyer | 40-minute introduction

Stop chasing clients. Become the lawyer they seek out.

As you graduate, you have learnt the law. Now build the commercial skills to earn your position.

You can study law without yet knowing how a law firm works. Start with the language, roles and responsibilities. Then practise decisions and learn how to explain your contribution.

SIX FOUNDATIONS TO KEEP

No.	Foundation	The question to ask
1	Understand the firm Before you can contribute, understand the workplace.	Who should do what when an enquiry arrives, and who is responsible for supervising the work?
2	Know your responsibilities A good commercial decision must also be a responsible one.	Would winning this instruction justify acting outside your competence or disclosing a client's information?
3	Understand the money Time worked, fees billed and cash received are different things.	If a fee earner records eight hours, does the firm necessarily receive eight hours of fees?
4	Identify the client and legal issue Listen to the account. Establish the client. Investigate the legal issue.	What is the dispute, what legal issues need investigation, who is the client, and who else is involved? Who is the client behind the client?
5	Agree and deliver the work Clear scope is part of good client service.	Can the client explain what they are paying for, what is excluded and what happens next?
6	Build trust and show your value Relationships begin with concern for the client's needs.	What useful contribution could you demonstrate today, and what feedback would make it stronger?

THREE IDEAS FROM THE LECTURE

Idea	What it means
Commercially invisible	Technically brilliant, but unknown to the people who send work.
The client behind the client	The accountant, IFA, estate agent, borough solicitor or HR director who decides which solicitor the end client meets.
The first call	The one name a referrer rings without thinking, rather than one of five on a list.

WORDS YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND

A **matter** is a piece of client work. A **fee earner** carries out work that generates fees, potentially including solicitors, trainees and paralegals depending on the firm. Support colleagues also make an essential contribution. Job titles do not determine authority to advise.

Confidentiality concerns protecting client information. A **conflict** can prevent the firm from acting. **Competence** includes knowing your limits. A **supervisor** is a person authorised to oversee your work; **escalation** means raising an issue with the right person.

Billable time is work eligible to be charged under the agreed terms. Recording time does not mean it will all be billed or paid. Revenue is not profit. Client money is not the firm's spending money.

ONE CASE, THREE SEPARATE QUESTIONS

Fictional example: a company has an unpaid £8,000 invoice and its customer alleges defective goods. The dispute is non-payment. The legal questions concern the agreement, performance and possible remedies. The desired outcome might include preserving the trading relationship. Establish the client, authority, other parties, evidence and deadlines before proposing work.

"Let me check I have understood. Is that accurate, and what have I missed?"

Listen, take notes and invite correction. Do not promise recovery. Agree the actual service, exclusions, costs and next steps.

THE LAWYER'S MINDSET

Other industries can cold-call, promise results and pay commission freely. Solicitors cannot: no unsolicited approaches to the public, no misleading publicity, disclosed referral arrangements and strict confidentiality. So lawyers win work by being sought out, not by chasing.

Build this	Not this
Relationship	Transaction
Specialist	Commodity
Adviser	Vendor
Long horizon	Monthly target
Earned trust	Bought-in leads

Rack 'em, stack 'em, pack 'em: the volume trap. Volume legal work turns clients into units and referrers into suppliers. Build relationships instead.

INSIGHT

Trust first. Most clients cannot judge the quality of legal advice, even afterwards. They choose on trust, reputation and recommendation.

FIVE MISTAKES TO AVOID

- o Thinking the client is only the person with the legal problem.
- o Thinking networking means collecting contacts, rather than being remembered at the moment of need.
- o Comparing yourself to everyone else, instead of understanding what makes your own firm distinctive.
- o Treating referrals as transactions, so you are always building from scratch.
- o Forcing yourself on a client or referrer. A no is often a yes in time: it tells you what they need and when. Read the opportunity, respect the answer and keep adding value.

YOUR SEVEN-DAY ACTION

Research one firm. Explain who its clients are, which referrers send it work and what services it offers. Write an example of a junior's useful contribution and one question you would ask a supervisor.

COMMERCIAL READINESS IN AN AI-ENABLED FIRM

Commercial readiness means understanding how the firm operates and helping it attract suitable clients, earn trust, deliver value and sustain relationships within professional duties. Students practise researching client needs, asking useful questions, explaining services, following up appropriately and showing commercial judgement. The foundations make these skills usable; business development and marketing remain central throughout.

AI can assist drafting, research and other legal tasks. This strengthens the case for demonstrating value beyond producing a first draft: understanding a client, exercising judgement, building trust and contributing to ethical business development. Drafting and legal analysis still matter because people must assess and verify the work. Use only approved tools, protect confidential information and retain human review and accountability. The programme does not predict job losses or guarantee that client-building skills secure employment.

CONFIDENCE WITH SUBSTANCE

Discrimination and unequal access can affect opportunities. Preparation and competence strengthen a candidate's position but do not guarantee recognition. Employers remain responsible for fair recruitment. The programme helps students understand options and demonstrate learning; it does not require prior law-firm experience or equate confidence with competence.

In the AI era, being legally capable is the baseline. Commercial capability is the career.

CONTINUE THROUGH THE PROGRAMME

Ten weekly on-campus sessions: six taught modules and four build sessions. Record your skills each week; build an evidence portfolio through scenarios, group feedback and reflection. Enquire at rifat@thefuturelawyer.co.uk | 07572 382 995 | [linkedin.com/in/rifatsheikh](https://www.linkedin.com/in/rifatsheikh).

Rifat Sheikh co-founded a regulated London law firm and was its Head of Business Development & Marketing for 15 years. Over that period revenue grew 35%, client retention rose 40% and client satisfaction rose 30%. The programme draws on his work building referral relationships across the private, public and third sectors. He is also co-founder of REACH LAW, AI governance infrastructure for UK law firms.

Educational material for England and Wales. The 40-minute introduction is a starting point; the full programme provides structured practice and feedback across the process. Neither attendance nor completion guarantees employment, professional competence or a legal outcome. The Future Lawyer is not SRA-accredited or endorsed and does not replace legal advice, qualification, firm procedures or professional supervision. Use fictional examples and describe them honestly as simulations.