

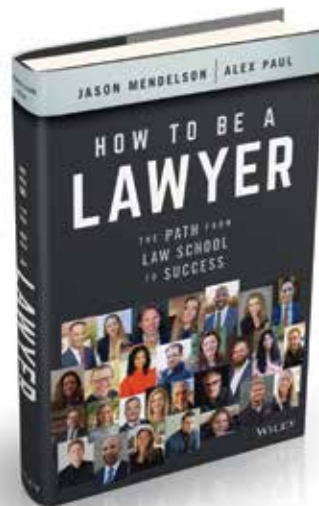
Book Review: *How to Be a Lawyer*

BY CASEY SHPALL

***How to Be a Lawyer: The Path From Law School to Success*, by Jason Mendelson and Alex Paul**

How to Be a Lawyer (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 306 pp., \$25.95) is a valuable compendium of practical information on how to navigate the journey from law school to a fulfilling career (not necessarily as a practicing lawyer). The book is premised on the belief that law schools are archaic because they teach students how to think like lawyers but not how to practice law. It aims to bridge the divide from post-degree to practice by offering a wealth of advice for getting the most out of law school, making the student experience more practicable, and putting a law degree to good use.

Authors Jason Mendelson and Alex Paul cover myriad topics relating to law and life. They discuss coursework and electives, effective listening techniques, how to be a fiduciary, preparing for the job search, dealing with difficult personalities, and how to be the calmest person




in the room. They identify the characteristics of a good lawyer—including enthusiasm, passion, resiliency, creativity, and authenticity—and how to foster these traits. And they offer sage advice on how to be a happy lawyer, such as making sure you have a life outside the law, managing

stress, working with clients and colleagues you enjoy, celebrating your victories, and not dwelling on the losses.

They also provide a unique discussion on the “core concepts of lawyering,” which are those soft skills (personal attributes enabling one to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people) necessary to become a successful lawyer. The core concepts, analyzed thoroughly and applied throughout the book, are (1) empathy; (2) listen first, then talk; (3) ask questions; and (4) always (usually) give advice.

Employing the “it takes a village” approach, over half the book’s chapters are written by guest authors—including private practitioners, government lawyers, in-house counsel, educators, and entrepreneurs—who candidly discuss their own paths from law school to thriving careers. Their honest and open reflections and insights are steeped in the philosophy and psychology of creating a fulfilling working life. They highlight significant events in their journeys, apply the core concepts to specific situations, and explain how they discovered what kind of lawyers they wanted to be. They also share a wealth of insider tips, such as recommended books, the best classes to take, how to align your values with your career, law school frustrations, and common roadblocks. The result is 24 distinctive chapters each as enlightening and engaging as the authors themselves.

How to Be a Lawyer is a great resource for those considering or attending law school and those beginning their career. And while it was clearly written with that audience in mind, I found the book informative and entertaining as a practitioner of many decades. I recommend it to anyone seeking to evaluate their relationship to practicing law regardless of where they are in their profession. 



Casey Shpall focuses her practice on natural resources and environmental matters as a practice group attorney at Greenberg Traurig LLP. Previously, she served as deputy attorney general in the Natural Resources and Environment Section at the Colorado Department of Law and as a trial attorney at the US Department of Justice, Environment and Natural Resources Division—shpallc@gtlaw.com.