



## Standing Out Thoughtfully

How to Be Memorable in the Legal Profession

BY NYSSA P. CHOPRA

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**M**ost lawyers were told some version of the same advice early in their careers: *Keep your head down, do the work, and let your results speak for themselves.* It's well-meaning advice, and in many ways, it works. Competence, reliability, and professionalism are essential in our field.

But in today's legal landscape, it's not enough.

In a sea of intelligent, hardworking professionals, being good at your job is the baseline. Standing out requires more. It's not about louder marketing or sharper suits. It requires being intentional, thoughtful, and strategic.

Whether you're applying for a job, building a practice, or navigating firm life, the question is the same: *How do you leave a lasting impression, for the right reasons?*

**Know What You Want to Be Known For**  
Before you try to stand out, pause to consider: *what do you want people to remember?*

- Your attention to detail?
- Your ability to think outside the box?
- Your ability to build bridges?
- Your expertise in a particular niche area?

The most memorable lawyers are the ones who lean into their strengths. They're not necessarily the loudest in the room, but rather, the

clearest in purpose. This requires self-awareness, intention, and a willingness to take ownership of your professional identity, even early in your career.

In many ways, this is the foundation of your personal brand—the impression people associate with you. It's the combination of your strengths, your values, and the way you show up in every professional setting. I'll explore this more deeply in a future column, but for now, think of it as the answer to one simple question: *"What do people say about you when you're not in the room?"*

If you're not sure yet, start by asking people you trust: *What's one thing you associate with me professionally?* Their answers may surprise you.

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One powerful way to define what you're known for is to become an expert in a niche, even before you graduate. Start a newsletter or post on LinkedIn focusing on an emerging area of law. Tools like Substack and Mailchimp make this easier than ever. Find a professor working in that space and explore being their research assistant or doing an independent study. Get published. Seek media coverage. When you control your narrative early, others don't get to create your story for you.

Connect the dots from your experiences. What skills are transferable across your roles? How do you demonstrate foundational skills like innovation, problem solving, or advocacy? The ability to articulate how seemingly disparate experiences connect is what makes you memorable in interviews and networking conversations.

### Write Like a Human

Legal writing doesn't have to be cold, dense, or inaccessible. One of the simplest ways to be memorable is to write clearly and with just enough personality to feel human.

That doesn't mean being casual or abandoning professionalism. It means:

- favoring plain language when possible;
- leading with the most important insight;
- writing for your audience, not for yourself; and
- designing for action.

That last point is crucial. Every piece of writing you produce should answer one question: *What do I want the reader to do next?* Too often, legal work stops at analysis. But clients, colleagues, and courts need more than knowledge. They need a path forward.

For a deeper dive into how design thinking can transform your legal work, see last month's column on design principles for lawyers.<sup>1</sup>

### Create Thoughtful Moments of Delight

Memorability isn't just about standing out intellectually. It's about creating an experience.

Think of the associate who always includes a clear cover memo with helpful bullet points. Or the student who follows up after a networking event with a handwritten note referencing a shared interest.

These things don't require years of experience or deep legal knowledge. They require attention, intention, and care.

The same principle applies to how you organize your work. Make it easy for others to pick up where you left off. Include clear outlines in your documents. Use consistent naming conventions in your folders. Add helpful notes in margins. Write status updates that make it obvious what's been done and what's still pending.

Small, thoughtful gestures—whether interpersonal or organizational—are what people remember, especially in a field that often feels impersonal. These practices signal professionalism and make you memorable as someone who makes others' lives easier. And in busy environments, that's gold.

### Find a Fellowship

Fellowships aren't just for law students. They're strategic opportunities at any career stage that give you credentials, meaningful experiences, and connections with like-minded professionals.

Whether you're a student, a recent graduate, or an established lawyer, fellowships signal to others that you're willing to invest in your own development. They provide space for deep learning, expand your network, and often open doors you didn't know existed.

Fellowships come in many forms. Some are research-focused, others are specific to a particular niche or area of law, and others center on leadership development or policy work. The key is finding ones that align with your interests and career goals.

For law students and recent graduates, consider:

- the Fulbright US Student Program for research or studying abroad;<sup>2</sup>
- Boren Awards for national security and language study;<sup>3</sup>
- Google Public Policy fellowships for tech policy enthusiasts;<sup>4</sup>
- Presidential Management fellowships for those interested in government service;<sup>5</sup>
- Berkman Klein Center fellowships for internet and society research;<sup>6</sup> and
- Equal Justice Works fellowships for public interest law.<sup>7</sup>

For practicing lawyers at all levels, explore:

- the Leadership Council on Legal Diversity;<sup>8</sup>
- international, national, state, and local bar association leadership institutes;
- fellowships at the Aspen Institute<sup>9</sup> and World Affairs Council;<sup>10</sup> and
- specialized fellowships in your practice area or jurisdiction.

Don't wait for the perfect fellowship to find you. Seek them out. Apply even if you're not sure you'll get them. The application process alone will sharpen your thinking about your goals and trajectory.

### For Law Students: Strategic Moves That Set You Apart

If you're in law school, you have a unique opportunity to build the foundation for standing out before you even start practicing. The legal job market is competitive, and everyone you're competing with for that first lawyer role will have a JD. So how will you differentiate yourself? How will you be memorable?

Here are strategic experiences that can set you apart:

- **Study abroad.** Become an expert for a particular region of the world. Expand your network. Learn a new language. Be attuned to cultural sensitivities in an increasingly connected and digital world. Understand the legal system in another country. Cultural competency is increasingly valuable in our globalized profession.
- **Take classes outside the law school.** Don't let your school's limitations define your education. Most universities allow law students to take classes at other schools within the institution. Consider classes within the business school or the departments of international affairs, public policy, or communications. Taking courses that complement your legal interests will give you substantive knowledge that most law students won't have, help you speak the language of your future clients, and demonstrate intellectual curiosity beyond the traditional legal curriculum.
- **Be a visiting student in a new city.** Many law schools also allow 3Ls to spend a semester or year as a visiting student at another law school. If you know you're moving to a different city after graduation, this is a strategic way to get a head start on building your network and community in that location. Planning to practice in New York but studying in California? Spend your last semester at a New York City law school. You'll make connections with students who will become your colleagues, meet professors who can introduce you to practitioners, and establish yourself in the legal community before you even take the bar. You may also get access to that school's career services, alumni network, and on-campus recruiting opportunities.
- **Get involved with your community.** Take on leadership roles. Volunteer at conferences. Join bar association committees, even as a student member. Start building your relationships from day one. The relationships you build now, whether


through student organizations, affinity bar associations, or volunteer work, will be the foundation of your professional network for decades.

- **Create your own opportunities.** From day one, think and act like an entrepreneur. What pain points do you often think about? What do you wish your firm, school, or organization did differently? What do you wish you could do? Then do it. Or create it. Think outside the box. Be that breath of fresh air in an industry that is often too rigid and too set in its own ways.
- **Choose collaboration over competition.** One of the most memorable things you can do is help your colleagues and classmates. Yes, you may be in competition with them in law school for grades or opportunities, but fast forward a few short years and they will be the foundation of your professional network. They will likely remember and appreciate the fact that you helped them during their time of need. Instead of seeing your peers as competition, see them as resources. People who are going to give you your next job, your next referral, your next opportunity, your next connection. One of them may even be your boss one day.

- **Map your path, but stay agile.** The key is to have goals and direction, but to be flexible enough to embrace new opportunities as they arise. Try to get as many different experiences as possible to diversify your perspective. Work at a law firm, extern at a government agency, try a startup, do a clerkship, intern at a company. Each experience teaches you different skills and exposes you to different ways of practicing law. You can't do everything, but be strategic with your decisions. Talk to practicing lawyers about what experiences were most valuable. Consult with your mentors. Ask your professors. And don't be afraid to try something that doesn't fit the traditional mold.

### Being Memorable Is Both a Skill and a Strategy, Not a Trait

You don't need to be extroverted, charismatic, or flashy to be memorable. You need to be intentional, clear, and consistent.

*What do you want to be known for, what impression are you leaving, and how do you amplify what makes you different?* Standing out in law isn't about gimmicks. It's about showing up with clarity, care, and the courage to be fully yourself. 



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### NOTES

1. Chopra, "Better Lawyering Through Design Thinking: 5 Design Principles Every Lawyer Should Know," 54 *Colo. Law.* 20 (Nov. 2025), <https://cl.cobar.org/departments/better-lawyering-through-design-thinking>.
2. <https://us.fulbrightonline.org>.
3. <https://www.borenawards.org>.
4. <https://www.google.com/policyfellowship>.
5. <https://www.pmf.gov>.
6. <https://cyber.harvard.edu/getinvolved/fellowships>.
7. <https://www.equaljusticeworks.org/become-a-fellow/fellowship-program>.
8. <https://www.lclcd.com>.
9. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org>.
10. <https://worldaffairscouncils.org>.



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