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# What do Legal Entrepreneurs Do?

## A Reflection on LEO's Den: A Career Panel of Roaring Proportions

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Legal Entrepreneurs Organization (LEO)

I will begin with a disclaimer: I am by no means a successful entrepreneur. At the very most, I am an ex-lemonade hustler with a knack for pocket change profits. I do not know how to run a business, and, aside from zippy lemonade, I have never monetized my ideas or creations. I once met with a colleague, a lawyer with all the grey hairs of wisdom you would expect from a legal entrepreneur, and pitched to him the idea of a student club about legal entrepreneurship. At the time, in my mind, all it meant to be an entrepreneurial lawyer was to run a solo practice or start up a firm. That was the limit to my awareness. As I discussed this with him, he said that a club of students talking about starting a law practice is like *the blind leading the blind*. He was right; none of us really know what it's like to make it on our own. In spite of this, I felt even more determined to learn what it means to be an entrepreneurial lawyer.

At the LEO's Den panel, four lawyers visited us, each with a unique story about becoming sole practitioners with their own special niches. What really stood out with this panel, out of every other career panel I have attended, was the passion and energy the panelists brought to the table. It felt like we were getting the straight dope, the real talk, or, the hard truths. The take-home from this was, and I make this point in case you decide to read no further: as an entrepreneurial lawyer, you can help others, you can make a living, create your own business, and live a life of your own design. What follows is my personal reflections from the panel based on some of the major points brought forward by the panelists. These have inspired me to pursue an entrepreneurial career path with more vigor, enthusiasm, and certainty. This list is a taste, and is by no means exhaustive of what it means to embrace an entrepreneurial mindset.

### Help people, or help find someone who can

Being resourceful is just as much a service as being able to provide a high-quality product. Let's face it, every client has needs that go beyond the services you can ever hope to provide. If you are well connected, then your clients will always have someone worth returning to, because your contact and value extends beyond your fleshy frame. Entrepreneurs leverage this capability by caring about each potential client that walks through their door. By caring, you will get to know their needs, and you can then take the initiative to point them in the right direction. Your ability to provide for your client will extend beyond your skillset as a lawyer. The benefits do not stop here; those who receive business on your referral *will* be grateful, and you will one day see clients referred to your doorstep in a similar fashion. A client referred is a client served.

### Learn from other people and cultures

In your life, everyone you meet is a potential teacher. Each person has lived a life of unique experiences that has required them to develop a unique set of skills to survive. Listen to others before you decide to cut them off or get your own point across. Think about it; you will gain more value from every conversation by listening more, instead of hearing yourself repeat facts you *already know*. People are naturally excited to tell you about what they know, and they will get a great deal of pleasure having an attentive ear to speak to.

Furthermore, other cultures are a great source of wisdom. As Canadians, we are fortunate to be immersed in a diversity of cultures, with different traditions, customs, and social ethos. Embrace this diversity as a learning experience to develop your personality and your interpersonal skills.



The Legal Entrepreneurs Organization is thankful for the time and enthusiasm of the panelists: Omar Fla-Redeye, Mike Hook, Ed Montigny, and Jonathan G.V. Hendricks

### Pay attention to Non-Verbal Communication

A good entrepreneur has a keen eye for details and making inferences. One of the speakers impressed our student audience by noticing the Iron Ring worn by one of the students. For those of you who aren't aware, the Iron Ring symbolizes the calling of an engineer. The panelist identified him as an engineer and explained that the way people appear tell a story about who they are. It could be something as obvious as the "Osgoode Hall Law School" logo on a hoodie, to something as subtle as a ring on a finger. By keeping your eye out for the details, we can connect with the people we meet in novel ways that show a genuine interest in the other person. Furthermore, by noticing these non-verbal forms of communication, we can learn things that would never have come up in ordinary conversation. As an entrepreneur, you can benefit from being observant by seeing an opportunity before it is vocalized.

### Network, Network, Network

In the business of law, being connected is never a bad thing. This value goes hand in hand with point number 1) above, as it will allow you to reliably refer your clients to someone who can help whenever you cannot. On a further note, being connected is also a way to create opportunity. If you have a goal in mind, a project, you will likely need the help of others. If you want to start an innovative new law firm or revolutionize the legal industry with a new cellphone app, being connected to a variety of people within the profession will provide immense insight and guidance as you pursue your dreams. None of this is to say that you should just network within the legal profession! Touching on point number 2), it is good to meet people of all different kinds of backgrounds and professions. People are everywhere! I have experimented with chatting up commuters while making my way around the GTA and have met lawyers, government officials, and salespersons. Opportunities are everywhere if you are open to taking the risk and saying "hello" with a smile. As students within the legal profession, you are in a privileged position to be mentored by accomplished lawyers with a desire to give back. Go to panels with the Ontario Bar Association, shake a few hands, and you will know what I mean. The support you receive will be *overwhelming*.

### Always remember to give back

Giving back means returning value to the institutions that gave you what you have. As future lawyers to be called to the bar, we are benefitting every day from the community and facilities here at Osgoode Hall Law School. Those of you who have attended student organized panels, networking sessions, and socials have witnessed lawyers volunteering their time to students

for free. If you ask them why they volunteer their time, they will tell you that they are giving back what was given to them when they were students. Collegiality is a virtue because it allows the free flow of favors and good deeds. In the end, the good guys get ahead and only the selfish get left behind. As an entrepreneur, you can thrive in a community of giving, if you are always ready and willing to give back.

### Recognize that every decision you make either brings you closer or farther from where you want to be in the future

Every choice in your life brings you somewhere. This is the unavoidable reality we are thrown into as existential beings. Before we can deeply appreciate where our decisions are taking us, we need a guide for what we want in the future. If you haven't decided upon your future yet, that is okay. At a minimum, you know when you are enjoying what you are doing, and almost certainly know when you aren't. Follow that – it is your compass. As long as it guides you down a path that is responsible, productive, and generates value, you are probably on the right path. Our world is filled with tempting distractions, now more than ever in human history. Ask yourself, does this night out, this television binge, this extra bottle of wine or tub of ice-cream bring me closer or farther from where I want to be in the future. This is an easy question to ignore, and it's why, as a culture, we are easily obsessed by short-sighted indulgences. Now, that's not to say a little diversion here and there is a bad thing. Why not plan your life to be fun, *and* productive? Rewarding yourself for your hard work is a virtue, but how often do we really deserve the reward? That answer is up to you. Let me put it this way: consuming for our enjoyment is not a sin. Though we should ask, do we really wish to define who we are based on what we consume rather than what we produce? As an entrepreneurial lawyer, you can choose the value you create for the world, because you are free from distraction. If you are defined by what you produce, there is no limit to what you can achieve.

In sum, I hope that you found these six points interesting, informative, and inspiring. As future lawyers, the world is open for you to pursue your dreams. We have privileged knowledge about how human society works, which no ordinary person can boast. Do not take for granted the talents and specialized knowledge your legal education has provided for you. Finally, I would like to leave you with a quote from Jonathan G. V. Hendricks, a dear friend and colleague:

*"Every lawyer can be an entrepreneur, but not every entrepreneur can be a lawyer."* ▲