

WHO WANTS WHAT FROM YOU:

The Law Firm Hierarchy

Law school taught you the law. It did not teach you the pyramid. Here is who sits where, what each level expects from a new associate, and how to deliver it.

THE PYRAMID Read top to bottom. Each tier shows who they are, what they want from you, and how to deliver.

1. Partners	TOP OF THE PYRAMID	
WHO THEY ARE	WHAT THEY WANT FROM YOU	HOW TO DELIVER
The top of the pyramid. Influence varies: some partners carry more weight because of client relationships, billable hours, or firm leadership roles. Working styles vary just as much (micromanagers vs. hands-off, frequent updates vs. finished product).	Reliability over brilliance. Work that is on time, polished, and consistent. Adaptation to their style, not the other way around.	Clarify deadline, format, level of detail, and update frequency on every assignment. Communicate early about delays. Never surprise a partner.

2. Senior Associates	MANAGES THE FLOW	
WHO THEY ARE	WHAT THEY WANT FROM YOU	HOW TO DELIVER
Often on the partnership track and managing the day-to-day flow of work between partners and juniors. Those perceived as advancing carry more respect than those seen as stalled.	Work they can pass up the chain without reworking. Clear questions, not repeated ones. Awareness of who they answer to.	Treat their instructions as the partner's instructions. Ask questions in a batch. Make their job easier and they will bring you onto better matters.

3. Mid-Level Associates	PRACTICAL KNOW-HOW	
WHO THEY ARE	WHAT THEY WANT FROM YOU	HOW TO DELIVER
Two to five years ahead of you. Closest to the work you are doing now, and the most useful source of practical firm know-how.	Teammates, not competitors. Someone who can take a task and run with it.	Observe how they handle partners and staff before you form your own approach. Volunteer for pieces of their matters.

4. Junior Associates (you and your peers)	YOU + YOUR PEERS	
WHO THEY ARE	WHAT THEY WANT FROM YOU	HOW TO DELIVER
Same class year, different practice groups, all learning the unwritten rules at once.	Discretion. Peers who do not gossip, take sides, or create drama.	Observe before engaging, especially in the first few months. Handle conflicts directly with the person involved, never through uninvolved colleagues.

5. Support Staff (secretaries, paralegals, admin)	INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY	
WHO THEY ARE	WHAT THEY WANT FROM YOU	HOW TO DELIVER
The institutional memory of the firm. They understand procedures and internal systems better than any associate.	Basic respect. Their names learned, their contributions acknowledged, their time appreciated.	Say thank you. Ask how things are done before you guess. These relationships shape your daily experience and your reputation.

THE HIERARCHY IS NOT JUST THE ORG CHART	Titles tell you the formal structure. Influence tells you who actually matters. Watch for: - Which partners hold the key client relationships - Which practice groups are growing inside the firm - Which associates the partners actually trust - How conflicts get resolved (and by whom) Spend your first few months observing this before you form alliances.
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RELIABILITY BEATS BRILLIANCE	Partners value the associate who delivers solid work on time, every time, over the one who is occasionally brilliant and often late. Four habits that build the reputation: - Meet every deadline - Flag delays and complications early - Follow through on what you commit to - Keep quality consistent, on every assignment, no matter how small
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