

Ashley Tedford
Office Services Assistant at MG+M The Law Firm
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8 Personal Reflection Questions

1. I was an Office Services Assistant at Manning Gross and Massenburg which is a large law firm with 13 offices across the country. While the job description made the job sound a bit more glamorous than it really was, for the most part, it matched. One of the things that didn't match was that it stated that we could go to court and watch trial but we were never presented with this opportunity even though we asked numerous times. It listed most of the administrative work that we did frequently but neglected to mention the little errands that we would constantly be sent on such as picking up birthday cakes, going shopping for gift wrap, setting up for office parties, ect. My co-op was paid which I was very thankful for but we were not paid equally with the finance co-op who was also on his first co-op but was paid more than we were. This seemed extremely unfair because we worked just as hard as he did yet were paid less. My co-op was not self-designed or international.
2. Most of the time on co-op was spent either doing administrative work or covering reception. By administrative work, I mean copying, scanning, filing, ect. I was working with lots of paralegals and attorneys some times who were all really great to work with. By the end, I began to feel pretty discouraged by this because it was very repetitive and because we were the bottom of the barrel there was no one we could pass the work off to when we were overwhelmed or wanted to take on bigger projects. This work really prevented us from having time to do the real legal stuff because they needed us to do the administrative work or unbillable work which then meant we couldn't put our knowledge to good use. It felt like we got trapped in a cycle with no hope to move up. They constantly told us how valued we were and how important the work we were doing was and in the end they all told us we were the best co-ops they had in a while. Our duties could not really evolve because we needed time to do the boring work. While we did get trusted with bigger projects I ended up working 50-55 hour weeks to just fit in those projects as well as the administrative work.
3. I learned a lot about how to be an employee and work with co-workers. At the beginning the other co-op and I found our work styles to be very conflicting while I was much more serious he was very goofy. I worried a lot about making mistakes and how that might reflect on us and he was much more okay with making mistakes and working with attorneys or paralegals to correct them. It took a lot of time, talking with our boss, and problem-solving to figure out how we could best manage this. This was probably the most important thing I learned on co-op because I will always have to work with people of different work styles and this was one good lesson.
4. I wish I had learned to relax a little bit on co-op. My boss would always say "No one here is curing cancer" because people would get very stressed out and sometimes take that stress out on us, but my boss really helped us to remember that it's just a co-op. Every time one of us would get overworked she would come and help us calm down or help us figure out how to talk to attorneys about deadlines and not take on too much.

5. I was surprised about how much the people you work with can impact your work experience. The people I knew at work and the more people that I knew really helped to make the grunt work much more enjoyable. I was also surprised about how approachable people were to talk to a budding future lawyer and to give advice and help networking.
6. The hardest activity on my co-op was helping to work on an audit. One of our clients insurance firms was auditing the cases we did for them so I helped all the attorneys track their billable hours and input their hour's information into a large spreadsheet. I was putting in lots of extra hours and learning a lot about finance in order to help with this. It was challenging because I had to learn a lot about finance, there was a lot of miscommunication, and tensions ran very high. I handled it by taking a step back, breathing, and attempting to clarify instructions to the best of my ability. I had to constantly double check my work and when I made errors accept the responsibility and redo it. I learned a lot about how high pressure a law firm can be and how to lean on different people when you are struggling.
7. I learned that I like to get my work done first and then relax later rather than take it all slower which was a benefit to my personal style but also was hard to work with people who liked to take things slower. I learned that I am a similar student as a worker because I like to keep things very organized and make checklists for my self.
8. The most exciting project that I worked on was a medical chronology. This meant taking thousands of medical documents and putting all the information into a spreadsheet that would make it easy for the attorneys to find certain documents with important information, as well as highlighting important information that could help in the case. It was exciting because it felt like I was really a part of the case and contributing. I was pretty prepared to do it with some instruction from paralegals but the medical terms were confusing.

Academic Question

1. My co-op taught me lots about social inequality especially in a high powered workplace in the financial district. I noticed lots of gender inequality right off the bat as there were about three female partners and about 10 male partners. While MG+M makes an effort to work on diversity through communities, it is still a corporate workplace that struggles with keeping women in the workforce as they become moms and need a less intense and fewer hours workplace. There is a lot of late night activities which are harder for moms with children and families ultimately making it harder to engage in the work environment and keep up with the clients in the same way as male partners. While I kind of expected this from what I know about wage gaps it was still shocking. I talked to a couple of female attorneys about how they balance a family and work life and most of them responded that you just make it work. They had each come up with different solutions such as partners who work from home or working from home and or late hours more often. I found out that 1 in 3 female law students will drop out of law school before they graduate! When I learned this I realized exactly why there are so few women at the top because they are constantly pressured to leave their careers for their children. When we were talking, one of the female partners told me that she left her last firm because

she realized she was being paid less than male partners at the firm and threatened to sue the law firm. She said that while MG+M is much more equal there are still things like bonuses that seem to be influenced by how much extra time you put into not only work but social events as well. This attorney told me to keep her contact because she told me that wage discrimination will happen to me and its not a question of if it will happen but how soon I catch it. She said to call her when this happens and she will help me to defend my self. I noticed some workplace discrimination as whenever there were heavy boxes to be moved or bigger tasks people in my office would ask the boy co-op to do them instead of me even though I was equally if not more capable. I was constantly told to smile more and seem more cheery even though I was taking on more complex legal projects than the other co-op and people in the office were always very satisfied with my work. I worked above and beyond constantly but was just as constantly reminded of my gender.