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**PIERCE & MANDELL, P.C.**



**Legal Assistant  
January-June 2023  
Kadijahtu Bah, Sociology**

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# My Role in the Organization

## The Organization

- Pierce & Mandell, P.C., a tiny law firm (about 12 lawyers and 5 admin) located on Beacon Hill
- Practice areas: Health Law, Employment Law, Business Law, Civil Litigation, Business Litigation, Intellectual Property, Insurance Defense, Real Estate Litigation, Personal Injury

## My Role

- Legal Assistant turned Interim Corporate/Health Law Paralegal (May-June)
- Paid co-op, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, In-Person
- Legal Assistant duties included: answering phones, prepping engagement materials for new clients, mail duties, transcribing/ summarizing attorney's notes, assisting with billing clients
- Corporate/Health Law Paralegal duties included: reviewing various business/transaction/ employment contracts for inconsistencies, legal research on client questions, setting up new business entities with the Secretary of State of Massachusetts, assisting clients with entity filings.





# Learning Goals

My main learning goal was to see what practicing different kinds of law can look like (which was definitely achieved since there was such a wide range of areas practiced at the firm), and to get more clarity on my specific career interest. I also wanted to acquire some knowledge on corporate workplace etiquette, and get a feel of what working in an office feels like. Additionally, I wanted to connect with attorneys and gain insight into the processes that led them to where they are now!



# What I Learned About Myself

Firstly, I learned that when I have a lot on my plate, I tend to slow down whilst thinking of everything I have to do instead of tackling the responsibilities headfirst. However, I realized that in order to maintain productivity I just have to stop thinking and start doing. I kept a to-do list that outlined all the deadlines of my tasks, and it helped me to get everything done in a timely manner without thinking too much about the tasks combined. It forced me to focus on one task at a time to increase my productivity. I also learned that it is difficult for me to ask for help, even when I desperately need it. However, I resolved this issue by the end of my co-op once I learned to swallow my pride and be honest about the bandwidth I had to complete all of my assigned projects. With my supervisor, we came up with a more efficient way to divide the work amongst all the admin which was definitely a relief (and we got things done quicker).



# Surprises about Co-op?

I was surprised at how relaxed the office culture was for a law firm! Business casual attire was still required on most days, but overall no one was as strict as I had thought about most office procedures, attire, conversations, etc. I believe this is partially due to the small size of the firm, making people more familiar and comfortable with each other. I think it is also because attorneys and clients were not coming into the office as frequently post-covid. This was another thing that surprised me- how few attorneys would actually come into the office. Most days they would work from home (minus a few) and the admin staff may be the only people in the office. My expectations were definitely of something more rigid, but I was glad it wasn't such.



# Most Exciting/Meaningful/ Interesting Part of Job



I really valued all of the corporate/health law work I got to do towards the end of my co-op. I got to work directly with our clients to set up their new businesses as legal entities in the state of Massachusetts. This taught me a lot about the different types of entities, and the legal requirements to operate a business. I also really enjoyed doing close reads of different contracts and agreements, examining the type of language used to see if there were any inconsistencies (compared to other or more standard contracts). This was especially interesting to me because it related to previous knowledge I had about legal contracts from music industry classes I have taken! Although I had never done that kind of work before, the previous corporate paralegal trained me and provided me with many resources to complete these tasks.





# Ethical Dilemmas

Working at any law firm, you will probably come across matters where attorneys are defending someone who's actions you may fundamentally disagree with, or where you feel incredibly sympathetic towards the opposing side of a case. This has definitely happened to me in my experience. It can be difficult to work on a case knowing your feelings towards the situation, but what helped me was hearing from attorneys on how they frame their defense. Rather than rejecting accountability for their clients or being cold to the opposing side, they gather all details and weigh out different arguments for both sides. Their aim is to come to the most fair settlement possible, not to evade justice. Additionally, working on some of these cases made me realize that most are not as black and white as they may appear; most fall within a morally grey area with a lot more nuance than I originally had thought. I definitely gained a lot more respect for the profession after understanding this.



# How Co-op Has Affected Me

As mentioned in the previous slide on ethical dilemmas in the workplace, I definitely think co-op has impacted the way I think of law as a profession. I respect it so much more, especially seeing all of the hard work attorneys put in and understanding the objectives at hand. It has definitely made me more open-minded when considering how to handle ethical questions. Additionally, I feel that coming into co-op, my work/life balance was very different to what it is now. I always strive to put in the most work in anything I do, and therefore had this belief that I should be “on the job” at all times. It would come to a point where I was spending all weekend trying to figure out how to approach projects I was assigned! I now understand how significant it is to separate yourself from work outside of office hours. It doesn't mean that you don't care about your job or that you're lazy, just that you are human and your life exists outside of your work.







# Sooo.. What's Next?

- This co-op definitely made me want to explore law further
- I have a clearer view of the direction I am heading in with law
- Next, I would like to pursue a co-op or internship working at the intersection of law and the music industry, or law to help disadvantaged communities
- Would also want to see what working at a bigger company is like, to compare
- One of my attorneys said to me, "the most important decision you need to make if you want to pursue law is whether you want to be a litigator or not." I'm almost 95% sure I do not want to be a litigator.



# Inequality in the Workforce

My co-op made me realize just how hard it is to pursue law as a Black person in this country. In sociology courses, we frequently talk about equity as an aim, but a struggle to truly achieve due to some believing the methods used to achieve it are discriminatory. Therefore, social inequality continues regardless of any measures to mitigate it that we believe we are taking. Only 5% of lawyers in the U.S. are black (despite us being 13.6% of the entire population), and if we take into account the roadblocks Black americans face in pursuing higher education and in the workforce (having to adhere to the values of a white workforce, getting into higher ed. institutions, financing undergrad and Law school, etc.) it does make sense. I was the only black person working at my firm, and throughout my time there, I didn't encounter any black lawyers when at other firms. I don't believe the hiring practices of these firms are discriminatory themselves, but the systemic roadblocks for Black americans makes it difficult to get a seat at the table (let alone multiple seats at the table). It did feel isolating and discouraging at times, but it did help me fully understand how structural inequalities can limit opportunities for marginalized populations.



**Thanks for Watching! (And to all  
future co-ops best of luck!)**

