

If You've Got It, Flaunt It:
Helping Students and Alumni Identify and Market Transferable Skills

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One of the toughest issues facing any lawyer embarking on a search for a non-traditional legal career is identifying which of the skills honed in legal practice can be both meaningful and marketable in a new position. Ideally, awareness of which skills to highlight to which employers would emerge, organically, as an outgrowth of a methodical career search process; from self assessment to market assessment, from market assessment to the creation of a personal resource network, and from network creation to marketing and selling yourself in a new arena.

Too often, though, lawyers get hung up trying to imagine what they could possibly bring to an alternative career and can't get past that roadblock. They don't always see what an outsider sees: that the tools of the legal trade can be unbundled from the study/practice of law and reconfigured in a way that adds value to numerous other work situations.

To better demonstrate the deconstruction of these legal "bundles," I have listed out a number of the most basic technical legal skills an attorney might develop on the left and, on the right, I have tried to break those abilities down into their basic, non-legal components:

Technical Legal Skill	Unbundled Transferable Skills/Benefits Involved
Legal Research & Writing	Reflects the ability to: organize thoughts, be creative, write persuasively, synthesize and analyze large amounts of complex information, parse out unnecessary material, meet deadlines
Pro-Bono Experience	Conjures up: sense of self-awareness, maturity, civic-mindedness, willingness to assist under-represented groups or individuals, desire to give back, jumping into tasks that require expertise beyond comfort zone
Document Review	Demonstrates the ability to: chunk large projects into smaller components, work independently yet function as part of a team, exhibit extended attention to detail, work for various bosses
Billing Time	Shows: accountability, discipline, organization, attention to detail, understanding of the bottom line
Litigation Experience	Teaches the ability to: think and speak on your feet, juggle multiple projects, deal/communicate with all types of people, ask questions, elicit specific information, hone presentation and persuasion skills
Transactional Expertise	Highlights: understanding of business issues/lingo, proactive thinking and negotiation skills
Regulatory Compliance	Recognizes: the ability to read, comprehend and interpret complex statutory and other regulatory codes and policies; the value of potential contacts with an understanding of the thinking behind an industry's regulatory body
Business Development	Identifies you as: a possible rainmaker in any business, an outgoing person who is easy to talk with, an employee motivated to succeed.

For purposes of jump-starting the career exploration process, I have created the above visual to generically demonstrate how the many skills lawyers use every day have a very real value outside the legal profession. Please use this chart solely for ideation purposes. In no way is it meant to limit the opportunities available to lawyers wanting to change professions; there is simply no limit to those possibilities!

Cheryl Rich Heisler is the President and Founder of Lawternatives™, a career consulting firm that helps lawyers and law students identify new career possibilities inside, outside and around the law.