



# THE FIRST YEAR OF PRACTICE MAKING IT THROUGH IS HALF THE BATTLE

BY MADELYN GRANT

**A**nxiety, excitement, fear, pressure. These are just a few of the emotions I feel as a young, female, criminal defense attorney walking to the podium in court each day. As 2019 comes to a close, I have had the opportunity to reflect back on my first year as a practicing attorney. I graduated from Cleveland Marshall in 2018 as an eager and unassuming young lawyer. I felt well prepared by my fantastic professors to tackle the big legal issues and work through the ones I had never encountered. As it turns out, the legal field and specifically the world of criminal law has had many obstacles and surprises that I never envisioned. **I am still just as eager and ambitious as I was a year ago, but due to the experiences I've had thus far, the doe-eyed look I once had has waned and my skin has grown thicker.**

I don't use the word surprise lightly, because I would be lying if I said that I was "surprised" to find that it was extremely difficult to garner respect as a young, female attorney in the field of criminal defense. Leaving law school, I knew that this field was still heavily dominated by men, specifically in the realm of the private defense bar. However, I didn't expect some of the struggles that women face in garnering respect across many fields to hit me so quickly and so aggressively like a ton of bricks. These obstacles include, but are certainly not limited to, having male clients look away from you as you're speaking — if they even allow you to offer insight in the first place. Going up against opposing counsel that act as if your entrance into the courtroom is a colossal waste of their time, and then battling that same opposing counsel to get a word in edgewise while standing before a judge. Constantly having to explain to clients or their family members that no, you are not the secretary for the "real attorney" and that you worked very hard to obtain the degrees hanging on your wall. These are just a sliver of examples

from a three-tiered, triple-layer cake, exploding with issues that I, and many other women, face on a daily basis. However, I can say with confidence that these obstacles have helped me to grow in ways I never thought possible and to appreciate the lessons I've learned.

I expected to learn lessons each day whether they be substantive legal lessons or hard-earned bruises from learning to crawl before I could walk. The bruises I've gotten have come quicker and more frequently than I had hoped. I have spent countless hours trying to learn and immerse myself in the culture of this sometimes disorganized, messy, frustrating, and yet brilliant criminal justice system. I have had to go far outside my comfort zone to interact with judges, bailiffs, prosecutors, fellow defense counsel, sheriff deputies, and support staff who work within the walls of the courthouse. I have learned quickly that these people define whether you will make it through your work day with your sanity still intact. These are the people that can make going to work and advocating for your clients a satisfying experience. As the youngest lawyer in my firm, I have been thrust into client meetings and hearings at the last minute due to scheduling conflicts. These unplanned moments have sometimes taught me more about myself and the practice of law than those for which I spent days preparing. I have sat across from clients and their families as we worked through devastating realities. I have had the pleasure of walking a juvenile client out of the courthouse with his case dismissed and a bright future ahead. The hard days and the hard lessons have allowed me to appreciate the good days and the victories so much more.

Being a young, technologically-savvy law school graduate has also brought with it certain advantages. I have had the chance to dive headfirst into emerging areas of law such as cryptocurrency, blockchain, and online gaming/gambling. Working in these areas has

allowed me to learn the technology working behind the scenes to better understand my clients and educate the courts. This is an invaluable asset that young lawyers have and must take advantage of as new areas of law develop. It is up to young lawyers to educate the courts in these emerging areas of law, create new boundaries, and provide counsel to our clients as they embark on new ventures.

I've seen firsthand the ability to offer guidance and assistance when it comes to the physical use of technology in and out of the courtroom. On countless occasions in the last year, I was able to offer my assistance in implementing technology into a presentation for a client, or assist another attorney in utilizing programs to review large discovery files. In these moments I may not have had all the answers to the heavy legal questions at issue, but I was able to utilize my young, technologically-savvy mind in other helpful and productive ways. These are the moments that teach you that there are several ways to grow in your practice and that acknowledging where you have more to learn and where you can jump in and offer value right now is important.

As I look back at my first year of practicing law, I am filled with gratitude — both for the lessons I've learned and the opportunities I've had. I have had the pleasure of traveling across the country and even internationally to work on cutting edge cases. I have become well acquainted with the triumphs and tribulations of practicing law in foreign countries where the way of life is drastically different and their criminal justice system bares few similarities to that of the United States. I have had the opportunity to meet and work with so many talented lawyers both here in Cleveland and across the country. I love nothing more than to pick the brain of an experienced attorney and hear their war stories from decades of practice. These are the moments that cannot and should not be taken for granted by young lawyers.

I have had the opportunity to assist my boss, Ian Friedman, in teaching Cybercrime at Cleveland-Marshall. While co-teaching with Ian, I am continually learning. I feel so grateful to go back to the place that taught me so much about legal theory and critical thinking and prepared me so well to deal with the many obstacles I have faced. I have done my best to find the time to join various organizations, and find those that I am passionate about. I have found solace and support in the Young Lawyers Section of the CMBA and the Cuyahoga County Defense Lawyers Association. Joining these organizations has allowed me to meet other young lawyers as well

as different generations of attorneys in an effort to create a vital network of support.

Being a young, female, criminal defense attorney is not an easy task. Some of the struggles I face on a daily basis and the bumps and bruises I've gotten in my first year of practice are not those I necessarily remember with a smile on my face, however, I appreciate each and every one of them. These bumps and bruises have taught me more about myself and the practice of law than I could have ever imagined I would learn in just one year. **I have come to understand that getting comfortable with being uncomfortable is half the battle.** For that, I am both grateful for all

that this year has brought me and most certainly looking forward to what's to come.



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