

EXPERIENCE — ANGUS MACDONALD, SAN FRANCISCO UP FRONT WITH THE LAW

Law student Angus MacDonald lands a summer associate position with a top law firm and overcomes his shyness by naturally sharing his enthusiasm about Buddhism.

I had the great fortune to be born into this wonderful practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and have accrued tremendous benefits as a result. However, I have tended to be reluctant when talking about Buddhism to people whom I don't know. Part of the reason for this diffidence may be because I attended religiously affiliated schools for a great part of my life, and part of it may stem from my own shy nature. I recently had a great opportunity to overcome this when I set about looking for a job for this summer.

Currently, I am in between my second and third years at law school at the University of California at Davis. At the beginning of each school year, law firms from all over California and other states come to Davis, as well as other schools, to interview second-year students for summer associate positions. These positions often lead to full-time employment; as a result, on-campus interviewing is a very competitive process. The firms that participate in on-campus interviews tend to look only for students in the top 20–25 percent of the class, which I'm not in, though I'm in the top half. The initial step for law firms is to screen dozens of résumés before they select whom they plan to interview, and needless to say, everything in one's résumé is very crucial.

Under my "personal interests" section of my résumé, I listed Buddhism as my first entry. Prior to submitting my résumé, a couple of people who looked at it suggested that I may want to consider deleting Buddhism because of the conservative nature of law firms. I decided to keep it. After all, what is this practice without faith?

At this time, I was consistently participating in as many activities as I could in the Davis and Sacramento areas. Among other things, I was chanting to receive maybe a handful of on-campus interviews, but fortunately, I got a lot more interviews than I expected. These on-campus interviews usually last only 15–20 minutes, so it's important to make an immediate impression. If a law firm likes a candidate, then it invites him or her back to the firm for a round of call-back interviews.

I can think of no better way to prepare for job interviews than to sincerely chant with a strong determination, which I did. During the interviews, I could really feel my strong determination and character exude. It gave me a lot of confidence despite my average grades. As a result I received several call-back interviews.

My first interview was in Los Angeles, where I was flown at the firm's expense. I was pretty nervous, but the first thing the interviewer wanted to know was if I had ever heard of "Nikiren Dai-something Buddhism." I was immediately relaxed. Apparently, this woman had just moved from New York, where a friend had introduced her to Buddhism shortly before she left for Los Angeles. We had a very pleasant conversation about Buddhism, and I gave her the phone number for the head office in Santa Monica and encouraged her to get in touch with the members in Los Angeles.

Throughout subsequent call-back interviews at this and other firms, a lot of people had shown interest in my Buddhist practice. It was a very natural way of overcoming my shyness in talking to others about Buddhism, and I was very enthusiastic in discussing this topic. Also, it was a great opportunity to engage in a friendly, congenial dialogue about

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Buddhism. For example, at one firm in Sacramento, three of the attorneys with whom I interviewed had theology backgrounds, and I had a very warm exchange of philosophical ideas — something that President Ikeda really encourages all of us to do.

I had strong preference to work in San Francisco, but I also realized it's a tough market to crack, especially with so many top law schools in the Bay Area. As a result, I interviewed wherever I could. Additionally, I wanted to work in intellectual property law, which deals with computers, patents, copyrights, the Internet and other high-tech areas. Because of the strength of the Silicon Valley and our economy, intellectual property law is a very dynamic area of law. However, it's also very competitive to get into since the vast majority of law firms specializing in intellectual property law require that candidates have a technical degree, preferably an advanced degree. This was an obstacle for me because I studied political science and history as an undergraduate, and had no technical experience.

In particular, there was a firm, which I knew about before I started law school, that I really wanted to work for. This firm is an established intellectual property firm in San Francisco with a great reputation. My chances of landing a job with them were very low considering my lack of a technical background, my average grades and a lack of significant work experience in the legal profession. Nevertheless, I sent them my résumé and cover letter.

Unexpectedly, I received a call-back interview from this firm. On the morning of my interview, I did a strong gongyo with my mother and sincerely chanted. My interviews with this firm went well, and although Buddhism was not brought up, I left feeling that I gave it my best.

Two days after interviewing with this firm, I received an offer from a Sacramento firm, which was pressuring me to accept their offer within a day or two. I called the San Francisco firm where I wanted to work knowing that it often takes several weeks for them to make a decision, and asked them if they were at all considering me. To my delight, the recruitment coordinator said my interview scores were among the highest of all the candidates, and that she would try to let me know either way in several days.

I have no doubt that the positive remarks from my interviews were the direct result of my Buddhist practice. I immediately turned to the Gohonzon because of the significant life decision that was involved. While the Sacramento offer was a sure thing, I did not want to lose the opportunity to work in the San Francisco firm. Either way, I had to make a decision whether to accept the offer from the Sacramento firm. I chanted to be in the best place to fulfill my mission for kosen-rufu.

The next day, I went to San Francisco to hand-deliver some thank-you notes to the people who had interviewed me at the firm where I wanted to work. When I came home after delivering the notes, the San Francisco firm had left me a message on my answering machine offering me a summer associate position, which I thrillingly accepted. At the crucial time, everything came together.

I am currently working there, and would like to work at this firm after law school. While the work is pretty challenging, I am completely enjoying what I am doing. My fellow summer associates all have very impressive credentials, go to top-notch law schools, and over half of them have advanced degrees in the technical sciences. I have no doubt that I would not be working at this excellent firm, with these people, without my Buddhist practice.

In conclusion, President Ikeda wrote the following to the youth of the SGI: "Youth should never be swept away by materialistic greed or desire for superficial fame. In other words, youth should not be like old men who selfishly avoid hard work and pursue their

own gain alone. Justice, courage and passion are the lifeblood and privilege of youth.”

This passage has particular relevance to my experience because the legal profession, as we all know, can be a very materialistic profession, where status and gain become barometers of success. Indeed the lawyers and summer associates at my firm are well paid; however, I realize that money is illusory and means nothing when you're unhappy.

As a member of the youth division, it is with justice, courage and passion that I strive to live happily each day — overcoming and welcoming my daily obstacles. I am determined to live a full life where SGI activities play an integral role. In addition, I am determined to use this actual proof as a springboard for developing a mission for encouraging my colleagues, classmates and others to practice this great Buddhism.

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