

## TAKING THE PLUNGE

### MARIKAH CALO

If you are reading this, it is probably because you have taken the plunge and decided to study law. Whatever your motivation to do so, you are probably well on your way to attaining an LLB degree. The issue that looms in most law students' minds is what they will do after graduation, and whether practising as an attorney is the best course for them.

#### Practising as an attorney

The majority of law students commence an LLB with the intention to practise as an attorney. This means that once you complete your LLB, you will have to serve articles of clerkship with a practising attorney for two years. Within these two years you will be required to write four Attorneys Admissions Exams. At the end of your two-year sentence, and provided that you have passed all four Exams, you will be admitted on the Roll of Attorneys (cue the quintessential picture outside the High Court).

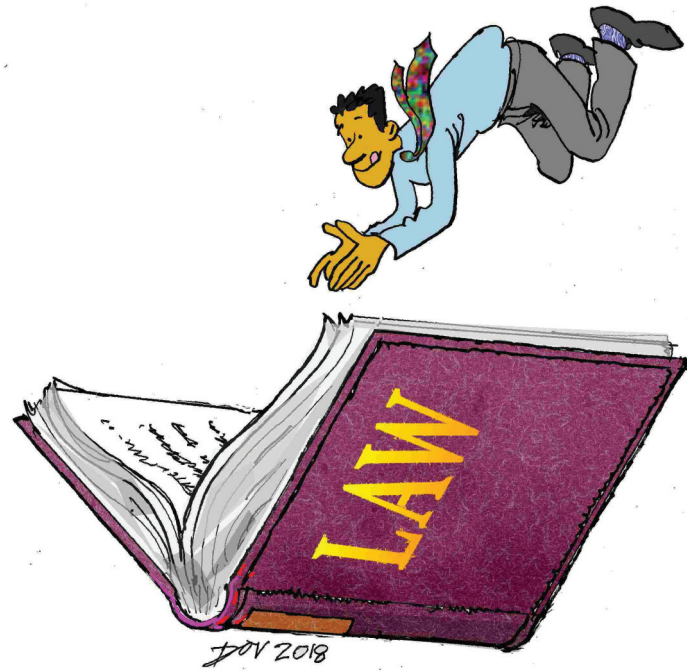
#### Commencing your Articles of Clerkship

Once you commence your articles, you'll quickly feel like a fish out of water. Nothing really prepares you for articles (even if you participate in as many vac work programmes as possible) and you will experience a serious learning curve that both humbles and terrifies you.

Before you start hyperventilating, your LLB isn't completely redundant once you get into articles! The following important skills garnered during your degree will come in handy during articles:

- **Work ethic** – an LLB is not for the faint hearted. Diligence and a good work ethic are what get you to your graduation day and will definitely assist you with the sometimes heavy workload you will face during articles.
- You are used to the **long hours and copious amounts of reading material** – the lengthy cases and plentiful prescribed readings will prepare you for the hundreds of documents, pleadings and opinions that you will have to read during your articles.
- **Research** – article clerks are often used for research. But as luck may have it, all those laborious essays will equip you with the ability to get stuck into research and (hopefully) find the answer that your principal requires.
- **Critical thinking** – the one thing law students learn is that no judgment, law or ratio is fool proof. Every legal issue requires critical thinking and not just accepting the law or problem at face value. This skill is important for articles as every problem put to you will be completely new and require problem solving skills.

In law school, every exam question has a pre-determined legal answer. I learnt very quickly that this is not the case in practice. Some problems do not have clear answers, and sometimes the obvious legal answer is not necessarily the solution best suited to your client. Corporate law firms deal mainly with large companies whose business and economic interests must be considered



In law school, every exam question has a pre-determined legal answer. I learnt very quickly that this is not the case in practice. Some problems do not have clear answers, and sometimes the obvious legal answer is not necessarily the solution best suited to your client.



Calo

when providing advice and finding the right solution. This is where your skills are seriously tested, and you realise that not every problem fits neatly into a square box or defined area of law.

With that being said, the best advice I have received thus far is – keep it simple. There is no legal problem that cannot be solved in some way or another. And if you are an overthinker like me, you will spend too much time over-analysing the issue and debating every possible solution. KISS – Keep it Simple, Stupid – is usually the best approach to a complex problem, otherwise you can easily become overwhelmed and frustrated.

#### Do I have to become an attorney?

While I have gabbled on about law firms and completing articles, that route definitely isn't for everyone – but not to worry, your legal career does not end at serving articles. There are many other options available to you!

- **Academic** – after completing your LLB, you can pursue a Masters degree which, once completed, will make you eligible to become an academic. If research, writing papers and lecturing sounds appealing, this one is for you!
- **Advocate** – LLB graduates can apply to the Bar to become an advocate. If

accepted, you will train for six months with a practising member of the Bar (pupillage). After passing the admissions exam you will be a fully-fledged advocate and your work will generally include research, drafting opinions, pleadings and arguing cases in court.

- **Business** – many companies jump at the prospect of hiring LLB graduates. You can dive into the realms of legal advising, consulting and even working as a legal editor for law databases such as LexisNexis.
- **Government** – the Department of Justice is always looking for candidates for the bench (that is, judges and magistrates), registrars, the National Prosecuting Authority, and legal drafters to name a few.
- **Politics** – if a career in South African politics makes your adrenaline spike, an LLB is a good foundation for entering the political realm.
- **NGOs and public interest organisations** – legal skills are often required in these organisations, and many LLB graduates find fulfilment working for worthwhile organisations such as the Helen Suzman Foundation.

#### If you read anything, read this

Law is a challenging, exciting and, overall, an incredibly interesting field. If you find your passion within this field, you are set for an exciting and truly rewarding career. However, if you don't feel this passion, practising as an

attorney may not be the brightest decision.

There are many sacrifices that come with practice. When you picture late nights at the office working on a complex matter, don't picture Harvey Specter in a perfectly ironed suit, glass of Scotch in hand in an unrealistically tidy office. Picture yourself as you look, and feel, mid-exam season – exhausted, slightly despondent and definitely not an advert for Givenchy.

This being said, the long nights, weekends and frustrating work days are worth it if becoming an attorney really is what you are passionate about. As an article clerk, about 80% of what you'll be doing day-to-day will not be exciting, thought provoking work. However, the remainder of your time will be spent on the riveting stuff that pulls you through and makes the mundane court visits, bills of costs and letters of demand worth your time.

My advice is to think hard about what you want (out of life and your career). There is an overwhelming pressure on law students to fit the mould and become an attorney. Remember that you can create your own mould and if practice isn't for you then it is totally okay to find your own direction. If you have decided that becoming an attorney is for you, then GOOD LUCK – you have a challenging, but incredibly exciting future ahead of you! •

*Calo is a first year Article Clerk with Cox Yeats.*