



1944

## Look before You Leap - Finding Your Place in the Legal Profession

North Dakota State Bar Association

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/ndlr>



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

North Dakota State Bar Association (1944) "Look before You Leap - Finding Your Place in the Legal Profession," *North Dakota Law Review*: Vol. 21 : No. 9 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/ndlr/vol21/iss9/2>

This Note is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Law at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in North Dakota Law Review by an authorized editor of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [und.commons@library.und.edu](mailto:und.commons@library.und.edu).

## LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

## FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

Special Committee on the Economic Condition of the Bar  
of the American Bar Association, 1945

## WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?

(Continued from last issue)

**The City.** In the spread between five and a hundred thousand population are cities of every character and background. The larger the city, the more it partakes of the characteristics of the metropolitan area; the smaller, the more it reflects the rural regions that merge with its boundaries.

There are few generalities that can be applied to these cities. Life moves at a progressively slower pace as the city becomes smaller, the opportunities for personal recognition increase with this downward trend, and individual characteristics stand out more prominently as competition decreases. It is probably easier to adjust to the conditions of living in these cities than it is either to the metropolis or the village, because they are such a blending of the two extremes.

**The Village.** The community with less than 5,000 population has more rural than urban characteristics. Costs and standards of living are lower than elsewhere, life is more leisurely, and the individual personality counts for the most. In the compact community of the rural village, a man is judged by what he is and does, but once his reputation for integrity and effectiveness is established, he has little to worry about for the future of his professional career.

In considering the rural community, the lawyer must take into account its possible importance as a center for rural trading. This is the secret of the professional success of those who practice in the smallest villages. They are drawing business from the families that come in to town on Saturday afternoons, as well as their immediate neighbors. This is the extreme example of the relationship between a city and its surrounding territory that must be considered in choosing a location for the practice of law.

## GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

**County Seat.** Particularly in rural areas, the fact that a city is the seat of county government is of great significance. Here are located the courts and county records that the lawyer uses in his professional work. Here, too, is often the center of trade and business for the county, though there are counties in which the county seat is not always so conveniently located. Where there are cities larger than the county seat, their relative value, from the point of view of need for legal service, can often be ascertained by checking the distribution of lawyers practicing in the county.

**Transportation Facilities.** If the lawyer must depend upon the surrounding area for a major portion of his practice, he must

locate his office at a point that will be convenient for his potential clients to reach, either by highway or rail. The intersection of major highways or railroads indicates a center of business activity worth considering, and the coming influence of air routes must not be overlooked in this regard.

**Climate and Topography.** It should be obvious that a lawyer with physical infirmities susceptible to climate should seek a location that will give him the greatest comfort. The effects of topography on potential business should also be considered. The lawyer who isolates himself on a point of land jutting out into the ocean or at the dead end of a mountain canyon, for example, is limiting his clientele to those who can approach him from only one direction. Relief, highway, and railroad maps all have an important part to play in the selection of a desirable location.

**Natural Resources.** Agriculture is not the only rural occupation that contributes to the work of lawyers. Lumbering, mining, oil and gas production are comparable fields of activity that can be measured to some extent by the natural resources of the area under investigation. If these resources are declining because of past production, it is well to ask whether or not other forms of business will replace them as sources of employment for the community.

**Relation to Other Communities.** The competition of a metropolitan center, effectively diminishing the prospects in the suburban cities on its fringe, is an extreme instance of the effects of one community on another in regard to the prospects for professional employment. The proximity of a state or county line, particularly the former, has the effect of limiting the range of territory from which the lawyer can draw his prospective clients. With the constant improvement of transportation facilities, it is always well to consider your choice of location in terms of a rather wide area of at least county extent.

#### COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

**Business and Employment.** The source and character of general business and employment are fairly reliable guides to the potential legal practice in any given area. The more settled and stable the business on which a community depends, the more certain the lawyer is of his prospects for steady professional employment. If you are seeking a permanent location, you should consider not only the present, but the past experience and future of the community—are its present conditions temporary, part of a trend upward or downward, or do they present the true picture of what may be expected for many years to come?

The backlog of general practice is often reflected by real estate transactions, decedent's estates, and, to a limited extent, by the volume and nature of litigation in the courts. These are matters of public record that can be followed in local newspapers or checked at the recording offices in the county court house. The presence of banks, lending agencies, manufacturing or commercial enterprises, and prosperous retail establishments are good signs of

business activity in a community that provides employment for lawyers.

**Social and Cultural Environment.** Cities and communities are as varied in their social and cultural backgrounds as any group of individuals selected at random from the general population. You will naturally want to establish yourself where these conditions are most congenial to your own nature. You will thus want to consider the educational, racial, religious, and political aspects of the community. In this way your own attitudes and background can be used to good advantage in your choice of a community where you know beforehand that you will fit into the existing social and cultural environment.

**Prestige of Lawyers.** It is well to investigate the standing of the bar in the community under investigation. Is it respected by the public generally, and are its members active in civic affairs? What are the relations between the lawyers themselves, are they friendly and cooperative, or are they mutually distrustful and antagonistic? It is unfortunate for the profession as a whole that unhappy conditions of this sort do exist, but more unfortunate is the lawyer who enters such a community without considering this matter in advance.

**Opportunity for Contacts.** Since the business of the lawyer depends upon his acquaintance in the community, you must investigate the opportunities that may be availed of to make and extend those contacts. This gives you an initial advantage in your home community, where you enjoy the benefit of family background and friends already made. Church, veterans, fraternal, and political affiliations are helpful starting points of contact in strange communities, leading to social associations that spread acquaintance-ship.

**Statistical Factors.** No valid or completely satisfactory formula for statistical measurement of the need for lawyers in any community has yet been established. Surveys have shown, however, that size of a county, both as to area and population, the density of population concentration, the ratio of lawyers to population, and per capita wealth are factors that provide a rough basis for comparison of relative desirability of given areas. The average age of lawyers, which can be computed from the Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory, is often a clue to the need and prospects for young lawyers. The Special Committee on the Economic Condition of the Bar of the American Bar Association is a valuable source of data on lawyer counts for communities and counties throughout the United States.

#### WHERE DO YOU FIT IN?

Your task is now to apply these considerations to the practical problem of finding your particular place in the legal profession. We suggest that you organize your inquiry into the four major headings listed below, jotting the relevant information down on paper to help you state the problem and arrive more readily at its solution.

**Personal Characteristics.** Under this heading, list your outstanding physical and mental characteristics, your personal attitudes that might affect your choice of occupation, your qualifications and training, and every kind of business or other experience you have had that might indicate the type of work for which you might be best suited. Any handicaps, weaknesses or shortcomings should also be listed, to the end that this catalogue will present a true picture on which you can base your subsequent conclusions. This should be as complete and accurate as you can possibly make it.

**Personal Desires.** Now review the outline as to what you want to do, how and where to apply your law training, in the light of this self-analysis. Do not attempt at this point to arrive at a single answer to each question, but give yourself the benefit of any alternatives that may appear to be equally attractive.

**Personal Opportunities.** You now pass from the subjective to the objective to consider the question of the opportunities that are available for the realization of your desires. You may find that one field of choice is already overcrowded, that another fits into family or other personal connections that would be most favorable. This will help to narrow your inquiry to those occupations that offer your best prospects for success.

**Personal Objectives.** By the above processes of elimination, you should arrive at a tentative statement of your personal objectives in the profession of law. This can be reexamined in the light of your personal characteristics, desires and opportunities, and you can then begin to plan on how you are going to achieve those objectives. You will know that your decision is based on a thorough self-analysis and consideration of the major factors that affect your choice. Your prospects for personal happiness and satisfaction in your chosen occupation will depend on how honestly and candidly you have conducted this study.

The consideration of all of these elements may appear needlessly confusing to the young man or woman contemplating entering upon the profession of the law. Yet when it is understood that this decision affects your future economic security and a professional career that will occupy the next thirty or more years of your life, the wonder is that it is not more difficult and complicated.

---

## THE SAN FRANCISCO CONFERENCE

By David A. Simmons

President of the American Bar Association  
Consultant to the United States delegation at the United Nations Conference  
in San Francisco  
(From July Number American Bar Journal)

To a great many people the reports from San Francisco during the Conference have been very discouraging. The disagreements have been so many and some of them so fundamental that