

Add Law & Mix

Older students use legal education to create perfectly blended second careers

By Melody Finnemore

Photography by Robert Reynolds

Intellectual stimulation, greater marketability, the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. These are among the reasons people decide to pursue a law degree after establishing first or even second careers. ■ According to the American Bar Association, a growing number of law students across the nation are older, more mature, and more seasoned professionally than students of decades past. That wealth of experience and perspective can help these second-career students succeed as they prepare for their new profession.

"We do find that candidates who have been out of school for a long time tend not to do as well on the LSAT," says Shannon Davis, assistant dean of admissions for Lewis & Clark Law School. "But people on their second careers may be competitive in law school for other reasons. Experience typically does enrich their application files."

Davis says that although the law school does not track applications from second-career students, each application is evaluated with the understanding that the appli-

cant pool represents diverse backgrounds, experiences, and skills. For example, Davis and her team expect recent college graduates to have letters of recommendation from professors, while they anticipate that second-career applicants will generally have letters from professional colleagues and supervisors instead.

"Also, their grades—which might be 10 or 20 years old, say—are not as likely to be a strong indicator of how they will do in law school," Davis says of second-career applicants. "They may have acquired different

skills in the course of their careers. That may make them more desirable in the legal marketplace, depending on what they want to do."

Several second-career alumni and a pair of current students recently shared with *The Advocate* what their first careers were like, what drew them to law school, and how they have found a way to blend complementary interests for their second careers.



Dennis Steinman '95

With degrees in Italian and international marketing from Temple University, Dennis Steinman worked for nearly 20 years as an executive. As a vice president in charge of franchise development, Steinman's job involved starting new franchises and exploring new markets domestically and internationally, all while ensuring regulatory compliance.

"It was hugely challenging and diverse. It involved working with people as well as the law, taking into account the unique dynamics in a franchisor-franchisee relationship, so it was truly varied," he says.

When it came time to pursue a CEO position, Steinman knew a law degree would make him more competitive. He had no intention of ever becoming a practicing attorney. "My plans were all geared toward giving me another dimension and being a more complete CEO for a company," he says.

By the time he finished his J.D. in 1995, however, Steinman had become intrigued by the possibility of practicing law. He realized that if he went directly back into corporate work, he might lose his chance. He and a few classmates decided to form a firm together.

"Once I made the decision to practice law and form a firm, that's when all the CEO offers started coming in. But I had already made the commitment. I figured

if it didn't work out I'd still be able to go into the franchise sector," he says. "I haven't looked back."

A big part of Steinman's practice as a partner with Kell, Alterman & Runstein is franchise law, but he also works with discrimination, disability, and civil rights issues. Among his most memorable cases, he says, was a successful class action lawsuit to make Cannon Beach more accessible to people in wheelchairs.

"It's very gratifying to not only help people, but also to correct wrongs that otherwise would affect people in future generations," Steinman says. "That's really exciting and it makes you work harder."