



WE'RE NOT JUST LOOKING FOR ATTORNEYS *we're looking for drive*

There's no better place to complete your articles than at Bowman Gilfillan.

- 1 Go to www.bowman.co.za and click on Application for Articles
- 2 Complete our online application form and upload your CV, covering letter, academic records, Matric certificate and a copy of your ID

Successful applicants will be invited to meet with us for an interview, presentation about the firm and a legal exercise that will give you a better understanding of what we do. If you have the drive to push your limits, join us.



BG *Bowman Gilfillan*
Attorneys

About the industry

From *LA Law* to *Boston Legal* and even *Allie McBeal*, law as a profession has, to a large degree, been glamorised by Hollywood. However, the real world of law is vastly different: forget smart suits, dramatic courtroom addresses and clients with bizarre requests; it's more about hard work and attention to detail.

In fact, the hard work starts the minute you've decided to become a lawyer, notes Graham Fehrsen, HR development consultant at Bowman Gilfillan. With significant numbers of LLB students graduating every year, competition to secure articles at prestigious firms is stiff. For example, Bowman Gilfillan, which along with Webber Wentzel, Denys Reitz, Edward Nathan Sonnenberg, Werksmans and Routledge Modise, is amongst the country's largest law firms, recruits approximately 30 candidate attorneys each year. Fehrsen emphasises that because places at good firms are so hard to earn, it's best to ensure your marks are steady throughout your university career. 'Recruitment selection is heavily influenced by your academic record, so if you've had mediocre marks, it's unlikely you will earn a place at a big firm. However, you can always gain experience in other areas, or complete a Masters degree (LLM), which will increase your attractiveness as a candidate,' Fehrsen says.

If a large law firm is not your style, consider one of the many boutique outfits that operate in South Africa, many of which specialise in a certain area of law.

FACT:

Attorneys are in the frontline of offering legal advice, while advocates are trained in specialist areas and are able to represent clients in certain courts. Advocates may be promoted to senior counsel or even judge.

Qualifications

In previous years, lawyers needed to complete a degree before entering law school. The system has since changed, however, and graduates may now complete a four-year LLB degree (although the programme may vary between universities). Post-graduate study takes the form of LLM or LLD degrees, and individuals may also acquire diplomas or certificates in specialised areas of law such as tax, labour law or human rights. Lawyers are

To find out more about Bowman Gilfillan, visit www.bowman.co.za

Organisations in the legal sector in Careers SA:

- **Bowman Gilfillan Inc.** see also p85
- **Werksmans Attorneys** see p129

also expected to complete Practical Legal Training, and to pass four sets of Bar exams.

Qualified individuals have a variety of options open to them, as almost every organisation in the private sector requires legal advice at some stage, and many prefer to hire in-house legal advisers.

Although 'lawyer' is a broad term referring to anyone who practices law, there are a number of specific roles within the profession. Attorneys, for example, are in the frontline of offering legal advice, while advocates are trained in specialist areas and are able to represent clients in certain courts (although attorneys are now also able to appear in the High and Constitutional Courts). Advocates may be promoted to senior counsel or even judge.

The public sector also offers a variety of jobs, including that of family advocate, master of the high court, public prosecutor, state attorney and state law advisor.

Lawyers can choose from a range of areas in which they would like to specialise, too, such as tax, corporate, mergers and acquisitions, conveyancing, property, intellectual property and family law. 'At Bowman Gilfillan, candidate attorneys are rotated through various disciplines, so they get an idea of what each is about,' Fehrsen reports.

Personality traits

Walking into a law firm is impressive: the premises are usually smart, the vibe is professional and the people walk briskly and with purpose. If you enjoy a corporate atmosphere and thrive on competition, you'll thoroughly enjoy this environment; but be warned, says Fehrsen: it's not for everyone.

'Law is extremely competitive,' he repeats. 'Even as a candidate attorney, your place as a permanent associate is not guaranteed – and as an associate, you can't take for granted that you'll be promoted to senior associate.' During your career, you'll constantly be measured against >>

targets, so it's tough, and a healthy dose of resilience and ambition are essential. These traits are also necessary because law is a demanding career, often entailing many hours of overtime. 'You have to be ok with working through the night while your friends are partying,' Fehrsen says. 'It's difficult to take time out, because others will overtake you on the path.'

Common sense is crucial, he continues, but so too is the ability to think creatively and dynamically; and maturity is a must.

The Law Society adds this on its website (www.lawsoc.co.za): 'Apart from general characteristics like dedication and a disciplined approach, the lawyer-to-be also needs to possess special characteristics like being impeccably honest, decisive, objective in a matter, confident, and able to solve problems. It follows that, because of his constant interaction with people, a lawyer must have exceptional communication skills and be able to explain difficult legal concepts in easy terms. However, the most important characteristic of any prospective lawyer is a well-developed sense of fairness and justice and the willingness to serve people.'

Meanwhile, qualities which serve advocates well include 'a mastery of the law, good judgement and the ability to present a case clearly and coherently.' ■

Pros and cons

- + 'Law is a fulfilling career – lawyers enjoy helping people and solving the problems associated with a matter,' Fehrsen says.
- + It's also prestigious, and because client liaison is a major part of the job, you're able to meet and mix with prestigious people at some of the country's leading companies, says Arthi Heera, an associate at Bowman Gilfillan. 'You learn a lot.'
- The greatest drawback is the profession's long hours and the pressure that comes with a deadline-oriented career.

FOR MORE INFO:

www.lawsoc.co.za

www.bmdnet.co.za/L/Law%20Careers.htm

www.sabar.co.za



'As an associate, my job entails liaising with clients about their matters and drafting agreements. It's taught me a lot: as a student, I often hesitated to speak my mind, but through law I've realised that I have a voice and I'm not afraid to use it. The experience I've gained at Bowman Gilfillan has opened my mind to so many areas. My favourite part of the job? Playing a role in large transactions.'

– Arthi Heera, Associate at Bowman Gilfillan

Armstrong Manganye – Legal intern at Bowman Gilfillan

'As a legal intern at the Department of Justice, I joined Bowman Gilfillan as a secondment to gain experience of private sector law. The latter differs significantly to the public sector, where the work is more administrative, rather than practical, in nature, and the hours are more demanding. The largest part of my job is legal research, but I also attend court proceedings and draft agreements. It's a rewarding job, and one I feel passionate about because many South Africans are still unaware of their legal rights.'