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WTF?

What R U thinking?

Tracey I. Batt / Special to NLJ.com
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I have, [in the past](#), waxed poetic on the subject of what a joy it is to mentor today's generation of law students. Make no mistake, I love working with my interns. I love shaping young minds. I love having my aging mind shaped by younger ones in turn. I love discussing and arguing minutiae with people who are learning about new legal concepts. I love seeing the eager look in law students' eyes when I regale them with tales of my big-firm exploits. In fact, I love almost everything about working with law students.

However, there is one thing about working with these young kids today, with their boom-boom music and their bling-bling, that absolutely drives me to distraction. What on earth could possibly give anyone the idea that it is acceptable in any business climate to send a missive to a supervisor or, even worse, a potential employer, with improper grammar spelling, punctuation, or capitalization?

Let us begin with the job application. Maybe I bring it on myself by fostering a casual working environment. This is what it says on my intern recruiting flyers:

Be creative! Tell me something interesting that isn't on your résumé. Tell me about your experiences as an artist, musician, dancer, filmmaker, or juggler. Tell me how you can't even hold a guitar but won an guitar contest after drinking too many Kamikazes. Tell me how you had an epiphany in Copyright class and discovered that Intellectual Property law is the coolest thing ever. Send me your favorite joke or website, if you can do so without violating your law school's diversity policy. The more you make me laugh, the more likely I will be to want to work with you. I want you to look back your time with New Jersey Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, Inc. and remember it as one of the most educational and enjoyable experiences of your law school career.

In what alternative universe does that translate to, "You do not need to spell-check your cover letter"?

You are in law school. You have chosen a very difficult and demanding profession, one that requires a high degree of precision. You should agonize over every word and every comma in your cover letter to me, as well as to every other potential employer, no matter how laid back he or she may be. This is your opportunity to make a great first impression and stand out from the crowd. Don't blurt it by making the reader think, "I really like what this applicant has to say, but if he or she cannot be bothered to proofread a cover letter, what will he or she do with a time-sensitive writing assignment?"

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Yes, I want to foster a casual and creative environment. Yes, I want to be your friend and mentor. But first and foremost, you want me to be your employer. It will be in your best interest to impress me.

Let us now move from the subject of communications with a potential employer and allow me to vent my spleen in a similar fashion regarding less formal communications between today's generation of law students and their current employers. You are not a 15-year-old skate punk with giant pants. If I give you my cell phone number to use in case of emergency, do not send me a text message with no capitalization or punctuation. Do not, under any circumstances, enter a note in a file that includes abbreviations that are incomprehensible to those of us who still remember typewriters and carbon paper. I really do not want to track you down in a year to ask what "clnt em nis" means. (For those of you of my vintage, it seems to mean "client email not in service.")

Show some pride in your work. It is how I will learn to respect you. In addition, horror stories are beginning to circulate in the legal press about terrible BlackBerry faux pas. If you get in the habit while in law school of being careful, then you will be less likely to make those mistakes during your career. Think of it this way: Do you want to be remembered for the quality of your work or for including a confidential document in a message to a "reply all" list including opposing counsel with a note saying, "Did U see this?"

Tracey I. Batt is the Executive Director of New Jersey Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts. Before joining NJVLA, she was the Associate Director and Legal Services Manager of Philadelphia Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and an associate at Weil, Gotshal & Manges in New York, where she practiced copyright and music licensing law for seven years.

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