A Talented Lawyer,

Personality Traits That You Must Have.

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ABSTRACT:

Often times students apply to law school just because they have the grades to get in, however a person’s good grades and high mental capacity will not make him or her a talented lawyer. Along with these things, personality is the key to a successful lawyer! To be victorious in and out of the courtroom, a lawyer must have these four character traits: self-control, competitiveness, good and quick thinking skills, and the ability to adapt. As a team of four researchers we devised a survey to test for these four traits and in turn to test whether or not each subject is a worthy prospect to pursue a career as an attorney.
**INTRODUCTION:**

Want to be a Lawyer, a book published by the Law School Admissions Council, says a lawyer learns what he or she needs to be successful in law school. The book says a high-quality lawyer must have excellent writing skills, be able to read with comprehension and speed, be able to proofread and edit documents very effectively, have analytical ability, and be articulate when speaking, along with many other skills law school teaches (1). While these skills are valuable in the law profession, a trial lawyer must also possess certain personality traits that are essential for success. These characteristics cannot necessarily be learned in a classroom environment, but must already be inherent in an individual. Numerous qualities help an attorney in and out of the courtroom, but four personality traits can “make or break” a lawyer. These characteristics: Self-control, competitiveness, good and quick thinking, and the ability to adapt, are the four personality traits necessary for a powerful attorney.

A lawyer in a courtroom situation must be self-controlled and collected. This is important for many reasons, some quite obvious. First, when in front of the jury, an attorney must remain calm and in control. If a lawyer appears nervous and unconfident while talking to the jury, the case will also seem weak and the outcome will not be in the favor of that attorney. Additionally, it is imperative that an attorney keeps his or her emotions intact. For example, when an opposing lawyer, a witness, or the judge says or does something that is upsetting to the case at hand, a lawyer must keep his or her composure. If a lawyer speaks before thinking, he could say something that would be detrimental to the case. It is always in the favor of an attorney to stay in good standing with the judge and not appear to be a hothead. A lawyer must present himself as someone who is organized and in control of himself and the case in which they are arguing.
In movies and TV shows, there are many misconceptions about lawyers that lead the public to believe the job is much easier and entails a different lifestyle than it does in reality. However, one thing these TV shows and movies portray correctly is a talented lawyer’s competitiveness. It is understandable that a good attorney must have a hunger and willingness to win. Also, to be competitive a lawyer must be aggressive. Many times before the case even begins, a lawyer will be faced with a stubborn client. He or she must speak out against clients in certain situations and convince them the right way in which to handle the case. In addition to clients, a lawyer must be able to speak up when a judge, another attorney, or a witness says something misleading. The infamous word, “objection” is a prime example. Mattlock and other TV lawyers are often times seen jumping up and yelling “objection” in the courtroom. On TV this is to add drama to the storyline, but in reality a skillful attorney is required to be assertive and do things like this when the time is right in the courtroom.

One of the four criteria for the Myers Briggs test, a personality assessment test, is a prediction of how a person makes a decision. Often, the Myers Briggs test can help a person when trying to find a career that may suit one’s personality. The test shows two different kinds of decision makers, thinkers and feelers. The Myers Briggs says thinkers make their decisions not based on their feelings, but in a disconnected, impartial and logical way (2). They have a formal way of thinking, and attempt to keep their personal preferences out of the way when trying to make the right decision. Thinkers do not take conflict personally, but rather like a good argument. Because thinking is so important in the law profession, this is a character trait of over 50% of lawyers, male and female (2). Their thinking must entail quick logical decisions. Often times when in a courtroom situation, an attorney will not have time to consult with partners, but must make important decisions on the spot. These decisions must be rational and feeling cannot get in the way if one wants to win the case.
A trait related to a good thinker is the ability to adapt in certain situations. Adaptability is valuable when a case may take an unexpected turn. This ability can make or break a case in the courtroom. For instance, as stated in earlier paragraphs, the witness is very “unpredictable”, the possibilities of what a witness can say are endless. If a witness says something damaging to the case, a skillful lawyer has to turn the situation around and find someway to make the information appear irrelevant to the case in front of the judge and jury. While the ability to adapt is of great importance in the courtroom, out of the courtroom a lawyer’s day can be unpredictable as well. An attorney must be able to change his or her schedule and be available at inconvenient times. In the day to day routine of a lawyer, anything from new evidence in one lawsuit to a new case that may require immediate attention can occur. For a lawyer that is unable to adapt, it may be impossible to achieve all the things in each day that are necessary to keep the individual cases running smoothly and in the right direction.

Some would argue that the processes and skills learned in law school are most important when making a good lawyer. However, not everybody can be a successful attorney. Our study contends that a good lawyer must be a certain type of person with natural and instinctive personality traits that will help him be victorious in and out of the courtroom. We know that the foundation and background law school teaches is definitely necessary for one to learn the law and know how it is conducted. But, to practice and be triumphant, it is imperative that a lawyer be self-controlled, competitive and eager, a good thinker and decision maker, and have the ability to adapt to situations when needed. A person with a combination of these personal characteristics will make an excellent prospect for law school and then a law career, as you will be able to see with further examination of the results.
METHODS:

Subjects:

We administered our survey to 41 people mostly in the Chapel Hill area, but some were conducted in the hometowns of the surveyors. The questionnaire was not given in any particular environment. Some of them were administered in groups and some were individually. Our ages ranged basically from 17 to 25, although two subjects exceeded 25 years of age. Of the 41 participants, 16 males and 25 females participated.

The subject pool consisted of all racial, regional, and educational backgrounds. The only stipulation we had was that the participant was over the age of 17. People of the Caucasian race answered the majority of the questionnaires, however, this was not done on purpose. We did not try to give out the survey to subjects whom had higher educational backgrounds, but once again most of our participants came from the Chapel Hill area and were therefore students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. We did our best to administer our survey as randomly as possible.

Measures and Procedures:

As a group of four, we discussed different personality traits we felt a lawyer should possess. To do this, we talked about typical situations a trial lawyer could face from day to day. We used books, Internet sites, and even movies and television shows as the basis for our decisions. Once we decided upon the character traits we felt a lawyer needs for success, self-control, competitiveness, adaptability, and a formal way of thinking, we collaborated to make a survey to test for these personality traits.
Twenty questions on each trait, ten demographic questions, and ten, what we called, random (or dummy, as we called them) questions made up the one hundred question survey. The questions that tested each trait differed in length, but each contained only two multiple-choice answers. This was because we felt like many people would choose the middle option if they had the chance which would keep us from attaining real strong results. Some of the questions gave the participant a scenario with a problem and then asked what the reader would do if in that situation. For example, one of our questions that tested for adaptability stated:

23. When you have plans with a group of friends to go to the movies and someone in the group changes the plans to go out to eat do you...?

Get mad and don’t go

Go anyway, at least you’ll be with your friends.

Other questions were short, straight forward questions such as this one which tests for competitiveness:

18. When you play a game, is it...?

more important to win

more important to have fun.

The demographic questions tested for things such as race and gender. These are useful so that we can make correlations that we can look at to see if such things affect the personality traits. The survey also contained our “dummy questions”. These questions were used as fillers to through our subjects off about what we were testing for. We did not inform our participants what they were being
tested for until they finished the questionnaire. We did this so their answers would be true to their personality traits and not to whether they want to be a lawyer or not.

Each person in our group gave out ten or eleven surveys over the period from March 9, 2001 to March 19, 2001. The surveys were given out to a random sample of people in very laid-back environments. Many of these people were people that the surveyors knew very well. The participants did not ask any significant questions and seemed to enjoy the survey.

Once all the surveys were turned in, the survey key, which coded each question for the trait it tested for, was used to grade each one. On each survey the number of questions the participant answered which showed the personality trait was present were counted. For each trait it was a number out of 20. After each trait was counted, the participant was assigned a total, where we added up the numbers from each trait. For example, the survey showed that sample subject A scored 7 of 20 for competitiveness, 17 out of 20 for self-control, 11 out of 20 for a thinker, and 15 out of 20 for adaptability for a combined score of 50. A score of 50 is one of the higher scores that we obtained; proving that subject A is a good prospect to be a lawyer. After the surveys were scored and totaled, we put our data on a chart using Microsoft excel. Then we used the program to create a correlation chart where we could easily look at the data and make comparisons between different traits and also the traits and things such as race and gender.

RESULTS:

After each questionnaire was totaled and the data was placed in the chart, we looked at out high and low scores. The higher the total score, the more we held that the subject would be a good lawyer. Our lowest score was a 32, our highest a 61, and our
average was 45. The following graph shows the average for each character trait broken down into male, female, and non-gender related groups.

Males had a higher overall score and were extremely higher in competitiveness than female subjects.

When we did our correlation chart, we found high correlations in a couple of areas. There was a high correlation between high total scores and whether or not the subjects liked to talk about politics. Also, if the person attended college and had a high score on any of the character traits there was a high correlation. Among the high correlations, we also found some low ones. The correlation between high scores and minorities was very low. This may be because we had a very low percentage of minorities complete the survey. The following is a pie graph of the racial break up of our subject field.
DISCUSSION:

For our discussion purposes we are going to focus on three sample subjects, we will call these subjects A, B, and C. Subject A is a fairly high scoring female, subject B is a high scoring male, and subject C is a low scoring female.
Subject A had an overall score of 50 and subject B had a score of 57, which by our criteria makes them both good prospects to pursue a career as an attorney. As you can see from the preceding graph, subject A’s highest score is in the self-control category, which contrasts with subject B’s high score in competitiveness. This is interesting because it is often assumed that women are more self-controlled than men, and that men are more aggressive than women. While subject A is higher on some traits and subject B on others, it does not mean that both will not be good lawyers. A person well rounded in these traits will be the best lawyer. As you can also see by looking at the chart above, subject B is “well rounded” because his scores for each trait are numbers that are close together and two of them are even the same number. This has nothing to do with his being male, but just with the fact that he possesses these traits equally. This makes him an extremely good candidate to take on law as a profession. This does not mean either that subject A
will not do well as a lawyer, but it suggests that subject B might be a better all around lawyer. Looking back at the chart, you can see that subject C had an overall low score of 34 and that all of her character trait scores are low as well. Adaptability is her lowest score, being only a 6. This indicates that she would more than likely make a poor attorney. For example say that subject C is in the courtroom defending her client and she is questioning a witness. This witness surprisingly introduces new information to subject C that puts a whole in her case for her client. Subject C has shown that she is not very good at adapting, especially quickly. Without a good, quick recovery her case would probably be ruined, and her client would be convicted. This is just one way in which subject C could prove to be an inadequate attorney, not to mention her low scores on the other three traits.

Something else we have found interesting is on the correlation table we made with excel. The table shows a fairly high correlation, 0.37, between the total scores and whether or not the subject liked to discuss politics. This is fascinating because many students who plan to attend law school do their undergraduate major in political science. Political debate is often times about laws, which makes this finding from our correlation table very understandable. Many famous politicians were first lawyers, for example former President and Vice Presidents Bill Clinton and Al Gore. As for our participants, subjects A and B both liked to discuss politics and low-scoring subject C answered no to the question.

The correlation between high scores and whether or not the subjects attended college was also rather high at 0.54. While this correlation is not as high as the previous one, it is worth looking at. It is common knowledge that when people continue their education, they not only learn material from books, but they learn more about life. . Some of these characteristics, such as the ability to think in a formal way and the ability to adapt, may get better as the student is influenced in their college surroundings.
Data on Subject D, A College Graduate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitiveness</th>
<th>14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Control</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinker</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example we can look at another participant, subject D, who had an overall score of 60. Subject D had scores of 15 and 17 for thinker and adaptability respectively. Subject D was also a college graduate, which means he has had time to mature and develop these character traits.

To make the results better, a larger subject field should be targeted. More subjects would make the findings stronger and would also make it easier to make comparisons. Had we had more surveyors to administer the questionnaires we also could have attained better results. Because the surveys were given out only by Caucasians, our subject population may not have been racially balanced. However, we found our questionnaires to be very reliable in predicting consistent results between the character traits and the overall score. This survey proves to be an effective way of singling out whether or not a person should pursue a law career. This survey would be a great tool for students to use when considering applying to law school!
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REFERENCES:

