

Things I Learned from City Year: Read the PITWs!

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4. Develop a core theory for what you are doing, and narrate it through every aspect of your task. My core theory since City Year has been “dignity.” City Year treats every person with absolute dignity, no matter their background or education, by giving them opportunities not just for equality but for leadership. The decision not to make my career in direct service was a difficult one for me. City Year changed my perspective and my life, but my skills and intellectual interests led me elsewhere. Still, I live each day striving to treat others with dignity in every situation. This means the irrational law professor; the woman who cuts me off in traffic; that frustrating client; an overly aggressive opposing counsel; the innocent-until-proven-guilty criminal defendant; and the cashier at the grocery store who’s moving at a glacial pace. Everyone deserves dignity.

63. Refuse to fail. While I was a corps member, I learned during a conversation with a student that I was the first person in her life to tell her that she could go to college. She was smart, but after that conversation, she doubled down on everything. I don’t know where she is today, but I know her refusal to fail made her a success. Right now, I am incredibly blessed to be in an amazing job. I learn a lot every day AND I make good money. But it took a lot to get here. The dozens of resumes I sent, the scores of cover letters I drafted, the many networking lunches that ended in “I’m sure you are qualified, but we just aren’t hiring right now”: all of it led me to where I am today, because I refused to fail.

118. Learn when to ask for help, advice, and resources. The students who asked me for help on their homework always got it. Those who didn’t ask probably didn’t get all the help we corps members had to give. The same situation applies within the legal community. The legal market is suffering, and jobs are just not available for many qualified attorneys. The only way to succeed is through networking. People want to help; they are just waiting to be asked (email me!).

174. Seek balance in life. City Year required a lot of unpaid hours and sometimes exacted an incredible emotional toll. My co-corps members (also my roommates) always made sure we included a healthy dose of giggling in our days. Likewise, law school was sometimes pretty terrible. Studying for the bar exam was almost exclusively awful. Actually being a lawyer isn’t always great either; there’s a reason that drug and alcohol abuse rates are so high for attorneys. While I’m repeating **This is hard. Be strong. (my very favorite PITW, 159)** to myself at work, I know I also have to take time to be with friends and family, do yoga, listen to music, and just live my non-legal life.

