

The Zen of Law School Success

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FOR ZEN

*... the love of my life, my heart & soul,
my inspiration, my greatest teacher, my son.*

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Contents

Introduction	xii
1. Preparing for the Journey	3
Your Personal Relationships During Law School	9
Lifestyle During Law School	10
It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint	12
2. Knowing Your Universe	13
The Classroom Experience	14
Legal Writing	18
Study Groups	19
The Library	20
Your Universe of Important People	21
Student Organizations and School Competitions	21
The Law School Culture	22
Your Three Greatest Treasures	24
3. The Tao of the Law School Mind	29
Building the Way of the Law School Mind	32
Studying	34
Outlining	40
Studying for Essay Exams	41

4. Knowing Your True Self	45
Knowing What Type of Essay Writer You Are	47
ANSWER #1: The Law-Based Answer	49
ANSWER #2: The Fact-Based Answer	50
ANSWER #3: The Integrated Answer	50
5. Writing Final Exam Essays	57
Read the Call of the Question First	58
After Reading the Call of the Question ...	59
After Spotting Issues	62
Writing the Essay	63
A Quick Recap on Essay Writing: The Least You Need to Know About Writing Your Final Exams	73
6. Noreuil's Top Ten Tips for Essay Writing	75
(1) Before the Exam, Know the "Big Ticket" Topics	76
(2) Have a Template for Writing Out the "Big Ticket" Issues	76
(3) Don't Get Too Caught Up in Your Conclusions	77
(4) Try to Sound Like a Lawyer	77
(5) Look for Verbal Clues in the Fact Pattern	78
(6) Answer the Specific Question Asked	79
(7) Answer the Question You Know Best First	79
(8) Give Both Sides to Every Argument	80
(9) Use Transition Words (or "Signposts") to Guide the Grader	80
(10) After You Answer a Question, LET IT GO	80
7. Multiple Choice Questions	
Read the Call of the Question First	85
Critical Reading—The Fact Pattern	86
Eliminating Answer Choices	88
Reviewing Your Practice Multiple Choice Questions	90
A Quick Recap: The Least You Need to Know on Strategies for Answering Multiple Choice Questions	92

8. Noreuil's Top Ten Tips for Multiple Choice Questions	93
(1) Don't Ever Assume Facts	94
(2) Assume That Every Fact Is Important	94
(3) Avoid Skipping Around from Question to Question	94
(4) If Two Answers Are Opposite, One Is Probably True	95
(5) A More Precise Answer Is Usually Better than a Less Precise Answer	95
(6) Be Very Leery of Absolutes	97
(7) Focus on Conjunctions	98
BECAUSE	98
IF	98
ONLY IF	99
UNLESS	99
(8) When All Else Fails—Choose the Longest Answer	99
(9) Ask the Universe	101
(10) After Each Question, Let It Go	102
9. Handling Negativity and Obstacles	103
Negative Feeling: Fear of Failure/Doing Poorly	104
Negative Feeling: I Cannot Learn All of This Information	105
Negative Feeling: I'm Missing Issues on My Practice Exams	105
Negative Feeling: I Don't "Get" a Particular Subject	106
Negative Feeling: Other People Are Studying More than I Am	108
Negative Feeling: Overall Anxiety (Or Even Feeling Sick to Your Stomach)	110
Negative Feeling: I'm Miserable, and I Hate Law School!	112
10. Knowing Your Universe, Part II—Final Exams	115
Know Your Professor	116
Before the Exam—Know Your Locations	116
Before the Exam—Know the Rules of Protocol	117
The Day of a Final Exam	117
After the Exam	118
Grades	119

11. After the Journey	121
Appendix A A Note to Those Not Doing as Well as They Had Hoped	123
Appendix B The Energy Notebook: A Tip for Learning the Law	127
Appendix C Additional Exercises for Essay Writing	131
Appendix D Author's Note and Additional Zen Quotes	141
Index	145

Introduction

*When the student is ready,
the teacher will appear.*

If you are reading this, congratulations—you are ready for the law school journey. The purpose of this book is to help you succeed in law school. I have been teaching law school since 2000. I also lectured for eight years in the BARBRI pre-law prep program, where I taught entering law students how to succeed in law school, including classroom skills, study techniques, and exam taking tips and strategies. Moreover, I recently finished a documentary that tracked the lives of nine of my students for all three years of law school. I now share all of this accumulated knowledge with you.

Law school is a very unique experience—one much different than you experienced as an undergrad. It is a challenge that can undermine your confidence and deplete you of all emotional energy. I have had numerous conversations about the struggles of 1L life, and every single semester, there has been at least one student (and usually more) crying during my office hours. Others, however, seem to thrive during the law school experience. So why is it that some students thrive and others crumble?

Several years ago I began to notice that a lot of the advice I tended to give stemmed from Zen principles. In fact, I noticed that there are many parallels between how one should approach law school and how Zen principles teach one to approach life. I incorporated many of these principles into my teaching, which have been incredibly well received by my students. I've written this book to reach an even larger audience, in the hope that others might also be helped on the path to achieving law school success.

Zen is a way of life—and so is the process of law school success. This book offers a comprehensive way to approach law school life. The fundamental principles of Zen are the essential fundamental principles that a student should adopt for law school success: focus, discipline, awareness, and balance. This book will address all of these principles as they apply to the law school environment.

In Zen, the ultimate goal is to reach enlightenment (or nirvana). As for law school, the ultimate goal is to succeed (however one might define his or her own success). Accordingly, throughout the book I liken the end goal of enlightenment of Zen with the end goal of “succeeding” in law school.

Again, the fundamental principles of Zen are awareness, focus, discipline, and balance. Remember this during law school because these are the same principles that you need in order to maximize your chances of success. You must be aware of who you are (e.g., what kind of learner you are) and how law school works. You must be focused, having the ability to concentrate on the torts case you are reading, instead of thinking about the office memo you need to write or the contracts outline you need to start. Law school is about discipline—studying when you need to study, even though you have already put in ten hours of reading. And it is about balance—balance between the multitude of law school tasks, and balance between school and your personal life.

In each section of this book, I offer a Zen quote¹ to introduce principles that can be applied to law school life in order to maximize

1. Several of the quotes have been passed down from Zen Masters through the years and have no attribution; a handful of quotes/stories are from Daniel

your chances of success. In addition to offering a comprehensive approach to law school lifestyle, I also offer specific, practical advice for studying, outlining, performing well during the classroom Socratic method, and of course, succeeding on final exams. I sincerely hope you enjoy your path to achieving your enlightenment of law school success.²

*The journey
of a thousand miles
begins with a single step...*
— Lao Tzu

Levin's *The Zen Book* (which I highly recommend); other quotes I have attributed where appropriate.

2. If you find this book helpful, I invite you to visit my website at LawSchoolZen.com to email me and/or explore and receive additional information on law school (and bar exam) tips, strategies, exercises, student advice, quotes of the day, and video clips of the week.