

An Open and Shut Case: Expert Advice Provides Edge When Applying to Law School

by Melissa Campbell

The trend is fairly predictable: when the economy is down, the number of law school applicants goes up. And as the length and depth of the current economic downturn has surpassed that of recent recessions, the law school trend is holding true. Grim job prospects are causing many recent graduates to roll the dice and ride out the recession in a classroom while established professionals grappling with limited opportunities are looking to gain new skills to enhance their professional development and earning power.

According to Ann Levine, a law school admissions consultant, owner of www.LawSchoolExpert.com and author of *The Law School Admission Game: Play Like an Expert*, two things are happening in today's economic climate: more people are applying to law school, and these applicants are applying to more schools.

Consequently, the number of people taking the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) over the 2008-09 academic year has increased by more than 6 percent while applications submitted to the Law School Admission Council are well on track to surpass last year's total of 529,000. With only about 46,000 spots available at the nation's 199 law schools annually, the competition can get a bit fierce in a regular admissions cycle, but today that competition is intensified.

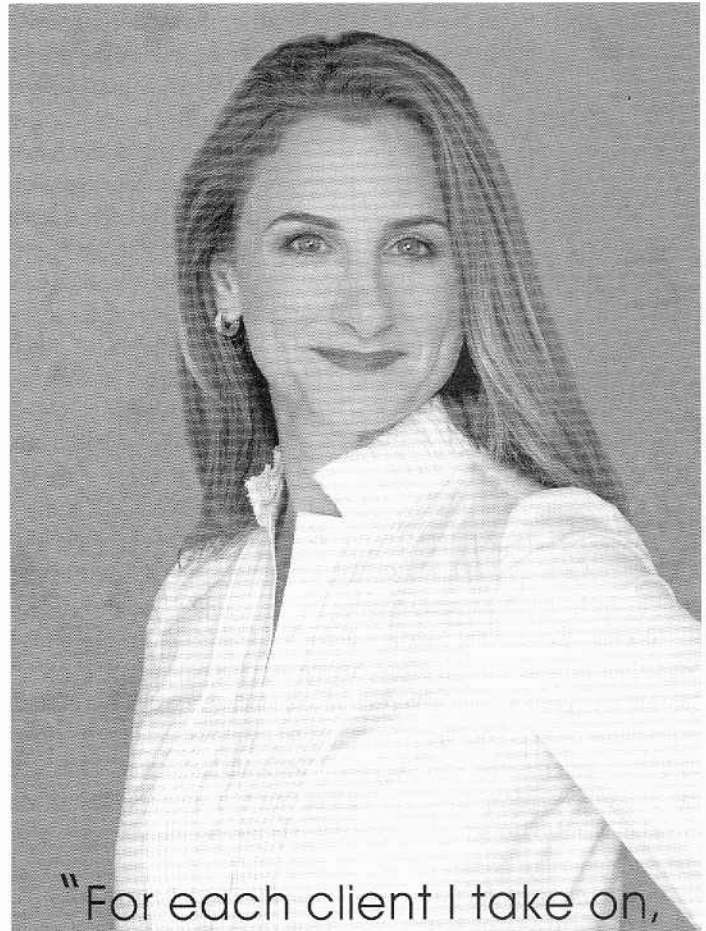
Levine, who provides individualized advice and counsel to hopeful law school applicants, would appear to be well-positioned to take advantage of the situation but limits the number of clients she takes on in order to provide the best possible service.

A former admissions director at two American Bar Association (ABA)-approved law schools, Levine established her consulting business when a family move to Santa Barbara left her in an area without an ABA law school. After practicing law for two years, she realized how much she missed working with students. She spent a week researching how to set up a business and then pulled the trigger. "When I set my mind to something, I don't delay. I execute," she says.

Three days after launching the business, she had her first client, and after three weeks, she had made back her initial investment. Five years later, she considers herself fortunate to be able to find a way to continue working with students in a meaningful way.

One of the undisputed facts about applying to law school is that it can get expensive. From LSAT-preparation courses, to application fees, to transcript requests, to campus visits – the costs incurred over the application year add up quickly.

While Levine offers several levels of service, she reports that the most popular package her clients purchase is what she calls "The Works." For a one-time fee of \$2,495, Levine will provide as much counsel, coaching and editing as the client desires. She maintains that she has no typical client,



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Ann Levine, Law School Admissions Consultant

although the one commonality among the students she works with is that they all share a desire to not leave their applications up to the “numbers alone.” Often that means explaining why a candidate has a perfect score on the LSAT but an average GPA or conveying the benefit of a person’s diverse background.

Levine estimates that about 60 percent of her clients are minorities, which in her mind defies the perception that immigrant families in lower socioeconomic brackets are unable to take advantage of admissions consultants.

“In many cases, it is the parents who call me first,” she said. “These are people who came to this country because they were so motivated to see their children achieve and attain opportunities not available to them. These parents realize that they are not great resources for their children because they may not be familiar with standardized tests or the admissions process in general. I find that these students are very willing to do what it takes and to make the investment to achieve that success.”

But there are very real obstacles that keep Hispanics, who comprised just over 8 percent of all law school matriculants in 2008, underrepresented in law. Many minority applicants have nontraditional undergraduate experiences: they may have transferred several times or worked while getting their degree. In many cases, just getting the degree was the main focus, so their academic record may not be representative of their academic potential. It may also keep some from applying.

According to Levine, if a student did not take the SAT to get into college, he or she may be unfamiliar with standardized tests such as the LSAT and not know that a minimum of three months is needed to prepare for this entrance exam.

“A lack of information may lead some students to be unprepared for the LSAT,” she explained.

A lack of information may also lead some students to set unattainable goals by applying to the wrong schools.

“Because they are not educated about the realities of the law school admissions process, they set themselves up for disappointment,” she said. “My job is to provide them with realistic and attainable goals. I want them to get into a better school than they would on their own. I believe students who work with me have more opportunities available to them because I can direct them appropriately. For each client I take on, I tell them, ‘Your dream of going to law school is attainable, but here is how you need to go about achieving that dream.’”

As a graduate of the University of Miami School of Law, one of the perennial top 10 schools for Hispanics, Levine is familiar with the Hispanic culture. In her role as a consultant, she enjoys helping minority students characterize their unique qualities.

“The more I know about a client, the more I can help,” she explained. “I look for a strong affiliation with another culture that can be showcased as a strength in the application, either in the personal statement or in the optional diversity essay. Some schools offer the opportunity to submit a diversity essay, but I always counsel my clients to be certain that if they exercise this option, they must write about themselves, not their parents. I work with them to identify what they bring to the table that would not otherwise be represented in the classroom.”

After five years of running her consulting business and Web site, Levine has captured her experience and insights in *The Law School Admission Game*, a handbook for anyone seriously considering applying to law school. The book explains each part of the process with matter-of-fact can-

dor and answers the questions most frequently asked by law school applicants, including: How do I decide which law schools to apply to? Why is the personal statement so important, and what should I write about? How do I explain a low LSAT score? Who should write my letters of recommendation, and what should they say about me? What can I do if I am waitlisted at my first choice school?

According to Levine, the tips and advice she provides in *The Law School Admission Game* make it a resource that gives applicants many of the advantages of a private consultant at a fraction of the cost. Her willingness to share so freely of her valuable information is a testament to how strongly she believes in the value of higher education, something she learned from her father, a retired dean who spent his career championing causes to enhance the student experience on a variety of fronts.

Not only is her passion for her work evident in her Web site, blog and book, she also conveys a sincerity and an approachability that distinguish her among her competitors. She maintains a social media presence on Facebook and Twitter, which she has found to strengthen her connections to the people who find and follow her.

Levine considers herself lucky to be doing what she does, but it is evident that a lot of hard work has gone into making this venture a success. A comprehensive and information-rich Web site provides an abundance of free advice and information. In addition, she maintains a blog (www.lawschoolexpert.com/blog/), which has had more than 100,000 visitors, produces and hosts an online radio talk show featuring law school experts, and offers webinars on a variety of related topics.

Providing free information online and low-cost information via her book is important to Levine, who seems committed to helping students navigate the daunting process. “I am gratified that I can help people on so many different levels,” she said.

As the ranks of our country’s future law professionals contend with new levels of competition due to a depressed economy, working with a law school admissions consultant can certainly provide an extra edge in the application process. And in times of such insecurity, that edge can go a long way in helping secure a successful future.

Law School: By the Numbers

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| 199 | Number of ABA-approved law schools |
| 83,400 | Number of students applying to law schools |
| 529,400 | Number of law school applications submitted |
| 6.3 | Average number of applications submitted by each applicant |
| 49,414 | Number of students who enroll in law school |
| 46,500 | Number of students who begin law school |
| 8,564 | Total number of enrolled Hispanic students in all years |

Source: Law School Admission Council, Fall 2008

