

Young Lawyers Connect E-Newsletter

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[First Thursdays Kickoff Reception](#)

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What Today's Lawyers Could Learn from Yesterday's Mad Men

By Mary Crane

I'm hooked. When Season Four of AMC's popular *Mad Men* program premiered this summer, I was stationed in front of my television, Old Fashioned cocktail in hand. I couldn't wait to see whether newly formed ad agency Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce has made it out of a hotel room and into real office space.

The program's key character, Don Draper, is a successful ad exec who concocts winning strategies out of thin air, then presents them in a way that closes the deal. He's a mentor who looks out for his team members and pushes them to succeed. He's a decorated war hero and the epitome of the strong silent type. Don is the one man every person at his Madison Avenue firm either wants to be or be with.

What's more, Don Draper epitomizes style—not just in clothing but in his approach to life.

Of course, Don Draper's far from perfect. His personal behavior is a lawsuit waiting to happen. But even this flawed character could teach lawyers a thing or two about old-school professional strategies, including:

- Be a man (or woman) of mystery

Don Draper keeps parts of his life hidden from virtually everyone. Where did he come from? What was his childhood like? What made him the man he has become? Don's decision to withhold such information has only increased others' fascination with him.

In a world where many lawyers are linked non-stop to friends and followers via Facebook and Twitter, be more like Don: Limit your electronic exposure.

Would Don Draper post photos on-line? Maybe. I can imagine him posting a photo of himself standing next to some clients at a charity golf event. And I wouldn't be surprised to find images on-line of Don receiving yet another award for his creative talents. However, Don would never post a personal photo that didn't help to position him as the consummate professional.

Would Don Draper create an on-line profile on a social networking site? Probably. I bet he would use LinkedIn to stay in touch with current and former clients. It's unlikely, however, that Don would ever "friend" someone. Don has colleagues. His children have friends.

Would Don Draper Tweet? Don might use Twitter to announce the formation of Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce. However, he would never—let me emphasize *never*—post: ‘Just downed a bran muffin.’

Take it from Don: Less is more. Limiting what people know about you enhances your allure. It’s a strong offensive strategy for making yourself more interesting and intriguing.

- Dress the Part

Don Draper consciously dresses in a manner that communicates he is a powerful and successful advertising executive. Everything about his attire—the stylish suits and ties, the cuff links, his pocket squares—commands respect. Clients are drawn to a guy who keeps a stash of clean shirts in his lower right hand desk drawer, ensuring that he always looks fresh and crisp at meetings.

Brooks Brothers and Banana Republic have made it easy for today’s lawyers to follow Don’s lead. For men, both have come out with stylishly tailored *Mad Men* suits, sales of which, reportedly, are brisk. For women, both retailers offer tailored pencil skirts and colorful sweater sets.

Many clients expect high-powered lawyers to dress the part. Meet their expectations. Instead of dressing strictly for comfort, dress in a manner that promotes your professional credibility.

And have fun: Flaunt those suspenders and shoot those cuffs. Pin on a signature brooch, and choose orange or purple. Do it Don’s way—with style.

- Revive Some Old-Fashioned Manners

Admittedly, some of Don’s colleagues at the former Sterling Cooper have done and said things that must make today’s HR professionals’ hair curl.

However, with a few notable exceptions, Don’s interactions with his work colleagues are nearly irreproachable. (As to his behavior with the firm’s women clients, well, that’s another matter.) He warns his young associate Pete Campbell about the repercussions of Pete’s maligning the reputation of a new secretary, and he skips the bachelor party hosted by subordinates at a disreputable club. In general, he maintains relationships with male and female colleagues alike that can be characterized as professional, respectful, and friendly.

He also minds his manners. When on an elevator with women colleagues, he waits for them to disembark before he steps off. He reminds one man to remove his hat while inside a building. He opens doors, holds chairs, and he helps women put on their coats.

Some men may say that when they try to emulate Don in this regard, they encounter a woman who snaps, “I can open my own door.” Indeed she can, and you should let her. But don’t let the exception swallow the rule. You will do nothing wrong in trying to resurrect a little old-fashioned polite behavior.

As for women readers, let’s agree that if you are reading this article, you are a brilliant NYC lawyer. When a gentleman holds a door for you, please don’t assume he’s challenging your competence. Accept the offer of assistance gracefully. And if he is questioning your ability, go ahead and out-lawyer him.

- Make Clients Feel Like They Have No Needs

In *Mad Men*’s third season, Lane Pryce, a Londoner, comes to New York as part of Sterling Cooper’s merger with the British firm Puttnam, Powell, and Lowe. To choose the firm’s new accounts executive, Pryce sets up a competition between Peter Campbell and Ken Cosgrove.

Near the season's end, Pryce informs Campbell that he's lost. When asked on what basis the decision was made, Pryce replies, "You are excellent at making the clients feel their needs are being met, but Mr. Cosgrove has the rare gift of making them feel as if they haven't any needs."

Every lawyer says they provide great client service, but only the most successful make their clients feel like they have no needs. These are the rare professionals who so thoroughly know their clients, their businesses, and their industries that they anticipate problems and propose pragmatic solutions before any actual need arises.

Mad Men further reminds us that when solutions are presented, sometimes it's better to leave the PowerPoint presentation behind.

I have nothing against PowerPoint. In fact, I use it all the time. However, I challenge you to create a pitch as effective as Don Draper's pitch to Kodak. He used slides, true; but none contained a single statistic or a chart. Rather, they were filled with pictures chosen for their power to move the emotions of his audience. Using nothing more than dramatic pauses and the music of his voice, he told a story that held his clients riveted.

Did he get the account? Hey, he's Don Draper.

Before your own next client presentation, Don-up.

- Develop Every Member of Your Team

It would be impossible to write about *Man Men* without mentioning Peggy Olsen, Don's secretary in Season One. She first shows her potential for advancement by volunteering her unique perspective during a product focus group. After she has further proved her merit, Don promotes her to copywriter over the objections of some of his male colleagues. No one, probably, is less gender-blind than Don Draper. But he recruits and rewards talent wherever he finds it, independent of gender, ethnicity or orientation.

In addition to developing members of his team, Don gives them second chances. After Peter Campbell discovers that Draper's name is an alias, he divulges the fact to agency co-founder Bert Cooper. Cooper gives Draper permission to fire the tattletale junior exec. Don, however, elects to keep him on, thereby securing Pete's loyalty. By the end of Season Three, Don recruits Pete for the new firm, noting that he had been ahead of Don in understanding several industry developments.

Every lawyer could learn a thing or two from Draper's management techniques. In meetings he provides rapid feedback, and he doesn't bother to candy-coat it. ("Give me more ideas to reject.") He tells his team when they need to rework an idea, and he shows empathy when someone working hard suffers a setback.

Finally, when you're recruiting members for your own team, don't disdain somebody like Don: He wasn't born into the right family; he never attended an elite school. Yet Don's strong work ethic, intelligence, interpersonal skills and creative genius continue to propel him and his firm forward.

The writers of *Mad Men* have created a fascinating, and deeply flawed, character in Don Draper, but they have highlighted some qualities that every effective lawyer should aspire to.

Now, let's get on with the show!

Mary Crane is the founder and principal of Mary Crane & Associates, a consulting firm focusing on all issues of business life, communications, diversity, and ethics. www.marycrane.com

Career Corner

Hot Practice Areas 2010 City Bar Summer Series

[Technology](#): Aug 3, 6:30-8:45 pm

[Immigration](#): Aug 4, 6:30-8:45 pm

[Healthcare](#): Aug 5, 6:30-8:45 pm

Committee on Law Student Perspectives Annual Program Welcoming Reception September 13, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Boot Camp 2010: Basic Training for Lawyers September 14 and 16, 12:45 - 5:30 pm

[Young Lawyers Connect Kick-Off Reception](#) September 16, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Careers in Government September 21

Careers in Labor & Employment Law October 12

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Ask the Experts

Q: I am an insurance professional with a law degree and I am interested in practicing law, preferably insurance coverage and or defense work. What is the best way to apply my skills to legal practice?

A: As an insurance professional with a law degree, you might first consider employment with a major insurance company, or with private firms with which these insurers contract to handle some of the insurer's litigation. However, you should not limit your options.

As with any practice area, law firms are most interested in attorneys who possess in-depth knowledge of their clients' business. An insurance professional knows the insurance business better than attorneys. This knowledge is what you need to "sell" to a potential employer. An insurance professional with a law degree has knowledge of the claims process and the obligations of insurers, but you also need to emphasize your extensive knowledge of cutting edge law involving general policy defenses, coverage issues arising under specific policy types, including general liability, commercial and personal auto, homeowners, directors and officers, and employment practice liability coverage, disputes arising under excess, umbrella and reinsurance contracts.

Also emphasize your ability to analyze claims and make recommendations to clients. Firms often market themselves to potential clients by offering training on appropriate claims handling practices to minimize liability. You might contact insurance defense firms and offer to assist them in providing such training to clients.

One of the best ways to obtain guidance on how to utilize your law degree is to schedule an informational interview with a member of an insurance defense firm. Be prepared to impress him/her with your knowledge of the law as it relates to their business. This should serve to elicit interest in you.

Also consider joining a networking group of insurance professionals. This may allow you to make contact with someone who coordinates the insurer's work with outside law firms.

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