Critical Questions for New Associates

Here is a partial list of questions to ask when you are new to a firm. No doubt there are other questions you should ask, but this list is a start. The answers will give you a basis for beginning to function in the office.

- How many hours am I expected to devote to the practice? How many of those hours must be billable to clients? Am I expected to work evenings and/or weekends on a regular basis?
- When are time sheets due, and how is compliance monitored?
- If I have a piece of new business, what approvals do I need before I may accept the engagement? What process is used to avoid conflicts of interest?
- Am I expected to take on any non-billable responsibilities? If so, how do I account for the time?
- How will I be given work assignments? Am I "fair game" for any partner going by my office, or are there channels to be followed? May other associates assign me work directly?
- What reports are expected from me regarding pending work assignments, the status of files, or other matters?
- Will I have regular and meaningful client contact. If so, how soon?

As you become more oriented over time, your list of questions relating to operations will grow and become more complex. Just keep asking! There is no harm in asking, only in guessing wrong.

From Making Partner: A Guide for Law Firm Associates, 2nd Edition
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http://www.lawpractice.org/catalog/511-0482