

Recently, several friends and family members have asked me if I think they should go to law school. As a practicing attorney myself, I always give them the classic “it depends.” If you or someone you know is considering law school, here are some questions to use as a starting point to figure out whether law school is the right direction to take:

1 - What do you want to do with a law degree?

Some people decide to go to law school without having a clear idea of what they want to do with their law degree. This works out for some law school grads, but the downside is that some people go through law school and then realize they don’t actually want to be lawyers. Some of these people easily pivot to other careers, but others feel like they have to practice law to help pay for the debt they amassed in law school. Don’t let this be you. If you’re interested in getting a law degree, figure out what you would want to do with it. Once you have an idea of what you might want to do with your law degree, find someone who practices in that area of law and see if you can take them to lunch and talk about their career. Shadow an attorney for a day. Look for an entry-level position in a law firm. Attend a hearing or a trial. The reality is that most law careers are nowhere near as glamorous as they are sometimes perceived or portrayed. Make sure you have a realistic idea of what a law degree will do for you before you take the plunge.

2 - How will you pay for law school?

Law school can be expensive, and it’s important to figure out ahead of time how you’re going to shoulder the cost. Will you take out loans? Could you qualify for scholarships? If you have a family, how will you support them while you are in law school? Figure out where you realistically want to go to law school (factoring in your chances of being admitted) and look up how much your tuition will be. Think back to #1 above. How much money will you make per year if you get a job in your target field? If you plan to take out loans, will you be able to pay them off? How long will it take you? Will you make enough money to support yourself and/or your family? Is it feasible to work for a year or two before law school to bulk up your savings? Calculating the cost of law school is a good way to realistically gauge your interest.

3 - How do you handle stress?

It's no secret the legal profession is plagued with stressors. From clients to opposing counsel to tight deadlines to the shadow of malpractice, attorneys have to navigate a minefield of stressors while staying sane and competent. Before you enter that minefield, ask yourself how you handle stress in your life. Think back to #1 above. What are the potential stressors in your dream legal job? Be honest with yourself. Will you be able to handle that stress?

4 - How do you handle conflict?

Not all lawyers spend their careers dealing with conflict, but many do. How do you handle conflict in your life? Do you thrive on it? Or does it bring you down? Do you consider yourself thick-skinned? Think back to #1 above. How much conflict does your ideal law career involve? Are you prepared to face an opposing counsel tearing holes in your carefully drafted brief? Are you prepared to sit at a table with two future ex-spouses who can't stand one another? Are you prepared to tell your client you lost on a motion (or the entire case)? Make sure your career decisions are based on a realistic idea of what stressors you could potentially face and your ability to handle them.

5 - Do you actually want to go to law school?

People go to law school for a variety of reasons. Do you actually want to go to law school? Or do you feel pressure from outside forces (such as family members who are lawyers)? Do you feel like you don't have any other viable options? If this sounds familiar, do yourself a favor. After you've done all your research, ask yourself if law school still sounds like something you actually want to do. If the answer is no, it's okay—there are plenty of great career options out there, and your dad will understand if a career in the law just isn't for you.

If, however, you still really want to go to law school, then go for it. I personally loved law school and do not regret my decision to pursue a law degree one bit. Law school and the legal field are challenging in more ways than one, but if you know what you're getting

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yourself into, you will be in a position to meet those challenges and build a rewarding career with your law degree.