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Yes, You Can Do That with a Law Degree

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## Yes, you can do that with a law degree

January 01, 2015 | Kim Nayyer

What can you do with a law degree? This is the title of a book a former classmate was engrossed in, years ago, at a time of a career crossroads. This was not long after we had graduated law school, completed our articles and become members of our respective bars.

We both were employed when my classmate pointed me to this book. But it seemed as though we had made the transition from law student to fully practising “real” lawyer almost by rote. Our professional lives now seemed fully mapped out by our JD.(Juris Doctor)s, and the strictures placed on us by our degrees felt profoundly confining.

This was perception. In reality, it wasn’t long before my friend and I each embarked on different and distinct paths. Where it had once seemed like our careers were set in stone, each of us found – or created – new and interesting opportunities, and with unexpected ease. Even more new directions were to follow for each of us, and unknown paths will yet unfold, I’m certain.

But at the time, the feeling of limitation and an ordained future was genuine. Perhaps an underlying worry about the job market and the economy was part of our hesitation about a future led by a JD.(Juris Doctor). I know new graduates and young lawyers who are similarly concerned now about job prospects.

I haven’t investigated, but I imagine the books on what to do with a law degree still exist, still get published, and probably still sell. Clearly, websites and blogs on career directions for JD.(Juris Doctor)-holders abound. And folks like me write articles like this one to point students, new grads, and junior lawyers to options, ideas, and others’ stories about what can be done with a JD.(Juris Doctor).

My own law school cohort gives some fabulous examples. Even just the relative handful of people I’ve kept in touch with or stumbled upon here or there, in person and online, are doing some interesting things. My friend who researched what to do with a law degree has worked with the foreign service for years, living abroad in some fascinating places, helping overseas Canadians in business, travel, and other opportunities. Her law degree offered a real advantage in the competitive process to pursue this career.

PROFESSOR, DEAN, JUDGE, POLITICIAN

Some of my classmates who don't practise law anymore are engaged in more "traditional alternative" careers. For example, a few law professors in Canada and elsewhere are among my fellow alumni. They are all impressive and distinguished, and I take some pride in listing them as former classmates (though naturally I claim no role in their accomplishments). Some even shifted into administration to pursue the role of law dean.

And some of my former classmates are now on the bench. This is impressive indeed, though a minor inferiority complex raises its head when I consider this for too long.

Politics and civic leadership is another career route. I count at least three or four political figures, at the municipal, provincial, and federal level, and some who reached fairly high-level positions. One member of my graduating class became a well-regarded and influential chief.

### AUTHOR, AGENT, PRODUCER, DIRECTOR

Of course, among those classmates who pursued the academic route, book authorship is not uncommon. Managing a law school library collection, I get to see newly published books enter our library. It's no longer surprising—though it still is exciting—to see my classmates' names on the spines. When I visited a famous American law school library not long ago, I made sure to take pictures of some of these books on its venerated shelves.

But other published law classmates are in the company of these ISBN-holding professors. One member of my graduating cohort is now a well-respected journalist and author. I'm fairly confident both the legal education and the critical approach to legal thinking were influential. And I have the non-fiction publication of yet another classmate on my shelf.

The publishing industry also has other spaces for lawyers. I was interested to learn, not long ago, of a classmate's work as a literary agent. It isn't unexpected though—to be a capable agent of any kind, one would have derived obvious advantage from a legal education.

Other options that exist in the arts are also exemplified by accomplishments of my former classmates. The first time I saw a friend's name in the closing credits of a film, as a producer of it, I was delighted, even thrilled. But again, whereas the title "movie producer" undoubtedly carries sheen, the role cannot be so unexpected for a lawyer who includes entertainment law in his practice.

More recently, I happened upon another classmate when I was at a conference. After we placed each other in our law school cohort, I was fascinated to learn of his career as a documentary creator, director, and producer. I like to think he found it somewhat cool that I'm a law school librarian.

Years after pondering what one can do with a law degree, I've learned the range of careers or activities it can support is surprisingly wide. It's correct that some classmates in these examples are not strictly working with their J.D. (Juris Doctor)s, or the legal education is not evident in their pursuits. I'm rather certain, though, that most have found the law degree a handy thing to have in

their work, or that it enhances their outlook. I believe law school learning can't be unlearned, if details may be forgotten. I might not remember what the rule against perpetuities precisely is, but I felt a secret extra connection to *The Descendants*.

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