

Guidance for Early Career Professionals in Privacy Law

IAPP's Privacy Bar Section Advisory Board (2024-2025)

Early privacy law career skills in focus

- Become a master of foundational concepts in privacy (e.g., opt-in vs. opt-out consent, privacy by design and default, and data subject rights.)
- Understand legislative developments and enforcement trends.
- Foster the ability to adeptly conduct research, knowing your resources and where to look.
- Sharpen your acumen in understanding the business objectives and culture of employers and/or clients.
- **Develop skills in:**
 - Different forms of writing (e.g., legal briefs and client advisories, operational documents, policy-focused writing and comparative legal analysis)
 - Communication
 - Active listening
 - Negotiation
 - Coping mechanisms to deal with challenges
 - Information and fact-gathering
 - What to ask, as well as to whom
 - Understand how technology works (e.g., operations, functions of certain technologies and awareness of emergent developments) by asking the right questions.

Early privacy law career resources

- **Education:**
 - Complete IAPP certification exams and training programs.
 - Participate in local IAPP KnowledgeNet events.
 - Attend webinars, continuing legal education and other resources through state bar associations.
 - Sign up for privacy, data protection and AI-related newsletters.
- **Networking:**
 - Identify key professionals and experts in the field to connect with and learn from their experiences.
- **Work experience:**
 - Have a variety of internships/traineeships to learn how different legal practices/sectors differ and overlap (e.g., law firms, corporations or government agencies).
 - **Mentorships:**
 - Hone skills by observing one's supervisors or more experienced colleagues.
 - Lean on unofficial or naturally occurring relationships, not only on formal mentorship programs.

Early privacy law career milestones

- When working at law firms, early goals revolve around expectations set by your firm or employer.
- When working in-house, early goals revolve around understanding the company's business objectives, building legal advice based on these objectives, and effectively communicating this advice to relevant stakeholders.

Advice to one's younger self

- Stay curious by taking an active interest in, learning about, and working on issues at the intersection of privacy and other digital laws.
- Expose yourself to opportunities.
- Invest in your professional growth through continued education, whether that be through degrees, certification programs, or CLEs.
- Mistakes happen; reframe them as learning experiences.
- Set boundaries for yourself by staying focused; do not lose sight of the problem you are trying to solve.
- Always listen for what, specifically, is being asked of you.

Build on success

- **To identify an area where you should focus on growth, ask yourself:**
 - Where did clients successfully implement my feedback?
 - Where did I receive positive feedback from clients or supervisors?

Final words of encouragement

- Attorneys can enter the privacy field regardless of age or years of practice.
- Retooling, moving to the privacy field from another, is common; know your strengths and what value you bring to the field through your background.
- Keep pushing forward despite the inevitable obstacles and rejections that come with any profession.