

Law School Essay

When the federal agents arrived early that morning, my friend Alan didn't have a chance. They took everything during the raid--every piece of computer-related equipment he owned, from disks to telephone cords. Alan, a competent "hacker," never did tell me that day's entire sequence of events, but I knew enough to realize that his life was changed forever. This was my first encounter with the law, and at the impressionable age of fourteen, I was affected.

Perhaps, then, my initial interest in the law arose out of fear for my own safety: I wanted to be certain that whatever I did with my computer was legal. Irrespective of the motivation, I began to ask questions and read about computer laws. To my amazement, I found little material. Over the next few years, it occurred to me that advancing technology was opening doors that society, armed with its laws, was ill-equipped to enter. This grew more apparent as outrageous anecdotes became prevalent in the media: computer failures in surgery, police arrests based on erroneous data, privacy invasion. While I continued to research the consequential dilemmas, I pondered their solutions and even published some articles. During these years, I saw the public begin to confront these dilemmas as well. Debate among philosophers, academicians, scientists, and lawmakers swelled, and then I understood: this was the dynamic, evolutionary nature of the law. Issues were emerging; ideas were forming. Society was responding.

When I matriculated in 1988, the engineering school at Penn did not offer a course which addressed the societal implications of advancing technology. During my sophomore year I approached a professor and we eventually created and taught such a course together. The class was a unique approach to education: we held round-table discussions with guest speakers who were experts in this relatively young field, including Mitch Kapor (founder of Lotus and the EFF), Jerry Berman (former ACLU lawyer), and Marc Rotenberg (founder of Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility). Through this class, my view of the law broadened. I saw how well-intentioned laws can be misused against people, even by the government. I witnessed how the absence of law and its framework for order and justice can be devastating. Most importantly, I realized that constructing the law in response to a dilemma can be a slow and difficult process because there may be no clear answers, especially when the dilemma is not fully understood. Nonetheless, I saw that I could apply my problem-solving, reasoning, and writing skills in constructing preliminary solutions.

My interest in this form of problem-solving extended beyond just technology issues. I found the intellectual process so exhilarating that I was eager to engage it with respect to other dilemmas that concerned me. Consequently, I joined the model United Nations organization at Penn. As chairman of a committee of about one hundred delegates, I researched, wrote papers, and moderated discussions on terrorism, Antarctic exploitation, Latin American economic unity, and drug legalization; I chose these topics because of their timeliness, their significance, their diversity, and their interest to me. Our debates were sometimes more educational and more practical than classroom learning. In fact, grappling with these issues forced us to think outside of academia. We witnessed the need for negotiation and compromise, and we often constructed innovative solutions. More importantly, we participated in a process that identified, confronted, and attempted to resolve societal dilemmas. I have participated in very few experiences which were as satisfying to me as these.

Lawmakers define how society will deal with complex issues. They contribute lasting improvements to the structure which governs society by addressing those issues which undermine society. It is my desire to actively participate in this process, and I believe that law school will be the beginning of a new education which will equip me with the necessary mental tools to attain my goals.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO I WAS accepted into an MBA program in my native New Zealand. However, I decided to postpone my graduate business education until a later date.

In the intervening years, I have used my law degree and background in accounting to fill a variety of management positions with a company with annual revenues exceeding \$100 million.

Working for various subsidiaries of this firm, I have been involved in reorganizing financial systems, developing and implementing new management reporting systems, negotiating union contracts, and selecting and installing computer systems, as well as, more recently, straight management troubleshooting.

My work has been challenging, varied, and educational, and in my work environment I have been granted—and become accustomed to—a high degree of autonomy. I have grown both personally and professionally. I have also learned a good deal about myself as I have functioned in so many diverse situations. I have seen that I am self-confident, aggressive, and ambitious. I have successfully navigated the uncharted waters of a number of unstructured situations by relying on what proved to be strong analytical skills and organizational abilities.

Accomplishing many different kinds of tasks over the past eight years has led me to believe that I can do much more—in fact, achieve whatever goals I set—if only I persevere and continue constantly to learn and to grow.

Others probably perceive me as a directed, capable, energetic, and athletic person. (I have competed, with considerable success, in numerous tennis and swimming contests.) They may also perceive me as someone who at times can be impatient. I have worked successfully with a wide range of individuals, but I hope that as I mature and learn I will become more of a leader.

What is most distinctive about me is that I have an international background, not only as a New Zealander but also as one who has worked extensively in Australia, Canada, Hawaii, and the continental United States. Furthermore, relying on my training as a lawyer, I have been deeply involved in litigation management. For the past three years, I have managed a number of high-rise building contract disputes involving protracted negotiations and the drafting of multiparty settlement agreements. As a result, I perhaps have a broader perspective than many others in terms of evaluating business decisions for their legal as well as economic ramifications.