TIBBS Career Blitz - January 2012

Career Profile of Patent Attorney: Nathan P. Letts, JD, PhD

What is your current title and how long have you worked in your current job?

Senior Counsel, 1½ years.

Where did you get your PhD and what discipline was it in?

I received my PhD from Department of Chemistry at Columbia University in Organic Chemistry.

Did you do a postdoc?

No.

What are your main daily responsibilities?

My primary daily responsibilities are (i) drafting life science patent applications; (ii) arguing with patent offices to get my clients broad patents; (iii) advising clients about (a) patentability (the ability to get a patent), (b) IP rights of others, and (c) commercialization strategies.

What are the keys to success in your career field?

The keys to success in patent law are (i) excellent written and oral communication skills; (ii) an ability to quickly understand new technologies; and (iii) attention to detail.

What were the most important factors in choosing your career path?

I enjoy translating scientific discoveries to legal documents and legal concepts to basic principles for scientists. I find helping a small client or university get an important patent much more satisfying than the basic research I did in graduate school.

What 1 or 2 pieces of advice do you have for people who want to land a job like yours?

My advice would be to (i) have many informational interviews with people working in the field (attorneys, agents, licensing/business development professionals); (ii) get an internship with a technology transfer office; (iii) take a law school patent class.