

10 celebrities who almost became lawyers instead of becoming famous

Maybe failing to complete law school isn't such a bad thing sometimes?

By Rebecca Bellow and Trevor Roberts

* This article first appeared in Inside Counsel Magazine on February 4, 2015: <http://bit.ly/1DcFRdY>

For some people, failing to complete law school can evidently turn out to be the best thing that ever happened to them. If these ten individuals had gone on to complete their legal educations and started to practice law – as they had originally planned – we would probably have never even heard of them.

Matthew McConaughey



by [Mr. Bombdiggity](#)

Matthew McConaughey, who won an Oscar for Best Actor for his role in *Dallas Buyers Club*, originally planned on attending law school after graduating from the University of Texas. But, as he revealed in a 2011 [interview](#), he woke up one morning – at about the age of 21 – and changed his mind. He decided he did not have the patience to wait several more years before he could begin a career and “make some kind of an imprint on society.” So, McConaughey switched majors to film production and, before long, became one of Hollywood’s biggest stars.

Julio Iglesias

Before [Julio Iglesias](#) became the world’s best-selling Latin recording artist, he was a goalie for Real Madrid’s junior squad. It was while Iglesias was pursuing his professional soccer career that he also studied law in Madrid. At the age of 20, however, Iglesias was in a serious car accident that left him paralyzed for two years. During his recovery, Iglesias discovered his musical talent when he began playing a guitar that was given to him by a nurse. After Iglesias regained the use of his legs, he began singing at many competitions and festivals. However, he kept his promise to his father and put his blossoming music career on hold to complete his legal studies. Fortunately for his millions of fans, Iglesias never practiced law, choosing to become a crooner instead of a counselor.

John Cleese



by [Bruce](#)

John Cleese, British scriptwriter and star of the comedy team Monty Python and such hits as *The Life of Brian*, *Holy Grail* and *A Fish Called Wanda*, received his law degree from Cambridge University in 1963.

But as Cleese noted during an appearance on CNN's [New Day](#), he was discovered while performing for the "Footlights," a theater club that was run by Cambridge students. Suddenly, the would-be Barrister found himself performing in the West End – London's Broadway. And once he was bitten by the showbiz bug, Cleese says he lost all desire to practice law.

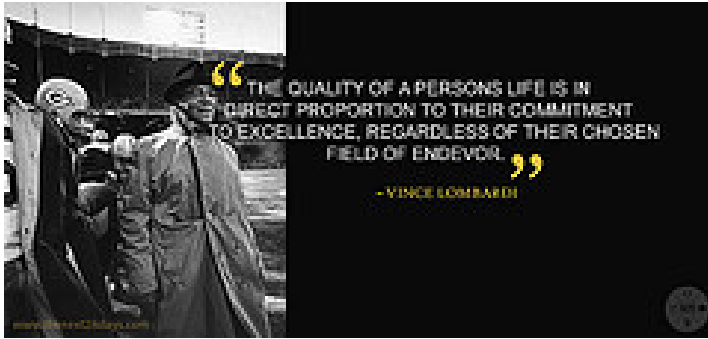
Gene Kelly



by [John Irving](#)

Gene Kelly is probably best known for his athletic style of dance performances, such as his song and dance rendition of [Singin' in the Rain](#). He is also well-known for many other musical films, including *Anchors Aweigh* and *An American in Paris*. However, many people may not be aware that Kelly was also accepted to the University of Pittsburgh Law School. For a while, Kelly tried to balance his pursuit of a law degree with teaching dance classes, but he soon gave up. After only two months, Kelly dropped out of law school to devote his entire life to dance choreography and performance, frequently teaming up with Hollywood legends Fred Astaire and Frank Sinatra.

Vince Lombardi



[Next TwentyEight](#)

Vince Lombardi was one of the most successful coaches in NFL history, leading the [Green Bay Packers](#) to five championships in seven years, including the first two “Super Bowls” in 1966 and 1967. In fact, the Super Bowl trophy is now named in his honor. One of Coach Lombardi’s most famous quotes is “Winners never quit and quitters never win,” but that philosophy evidently did not apply to law school. Lombardi attended New York’s Fordham Law School for only one semester before he dropped out because he believed his grades were too poor – even though he never failed a class.

Teddy Roosevelt

[Teddy Roosevelt](#) entered Columbia law school, but soon lost interest in his legal studies and dropped out to run for office. He began his political career in the New York State Assembly, but when his mother and wife died on the same day, February 14, 1884, he left New York to live as a rancher in the Badlands of the Dakota Territory. However, Roosevelt returned to politics two years later and quickly rose through the ranks, eventually becoming governor of New York and then Vice-President of the U.S. In 1901, Roosevelt became president at the age of 42 following the assassination of President William McKinley, making him the youngest person ever to assume office.

Bill Walton



by [Joits](#)

[Bill Walton](#) was a basketball superstar in both college and in the NBA. While playing center for UCLA under John Wooden, the Bruins had two undefeated championship seasons and Walton won the NCAA Player of the Year Award in 1972, 73, and 74. He also won two NBA championships as well as the NBA’s MVP Award in 1978. At almost 7 feet, he was certainly a big man *on* the court and he almost became a big man *in* court, having completed two years at Stanford Law School from 1980-82. However, Walton quit school and played several more years of injury-plagued basketball before becoming a sportscaster.

Karl Marx

Karl Marx, the revolutionary socialist and author of the Communist Manifesto also studied law in Bonn and Berlin. Marx appeared to be following in the footsteps of his lawyer father until he was introduced to the ideas of Hegel and Feuerbach. Marx eventually earned his PhD in philosophy from the University of Jena, but could never get a teaching position because of his radical politics. He instead went on to publish political journals in Cologne (until the paper was banned), and Paris (until Marx was expelled), then Brussels (until he was expelled again), and finally in London, where he died in 1883. While in London, Marx was also a European correspondent for the [New York Daily Tribune](#) from 1852-1862.

Harper Lee

Fortunately for the literary world, Harper Lee chose to write about legal drama in the classic American novel, [To Kill a Mockingbird](#), rather than live it as an attorney. From 1945- 1949, Lee studied law at the University of Alabama. Lee's father was a lawyer, as was her sister. Yet after her first year in the law program, Lee began expressing to her family that writing—not the law—was her true passion. When Lee returned from Oxford University in England that summer, where she studied abroad as an exchange student, she dropped out of law school after the first semester. Soon thereafter, she moved to New York City to pursue her dream of becoming a writer.

Henri Matisse



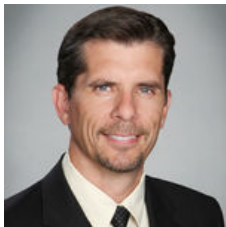
by [Jean-Pierre Dalbera](#)

[Henri Matisse](#), the renowned French artist, was well on his way to becoming a lawyer before he discovered his true talent. In 1887, while working as a law clerk, Matisse suffered an attack of appendicitis. During his recovery, his mother brought him a set of oil paints to pass the time. Matisse soon discovered that painting provided him “a kind of paradise” so he decided to become an artist – much to the disappointment of his father. During his prolific 50-year career, Matisse created many masterful paintings, drawings, sculptures and cut outs. It is difficult to imagine how different the world would be if Matisse had decided to practice law instead of producing art.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Rebecca Bellow is an attorney at [WHGC, P.L.C.](#) whose practice focuses on business litigation, civil litigation and intellectual property. Ms. Bellow also represents clients in a wide array of litigation matters including general and complex civil litigation, patent and trademark infringement, and business torts. Rebeccabellow@whgclaw.com



Trevor K. Roberts is Of Counsel at WHGC, P.L.C. Mr. Roberts studied Mandarin at Taiwan Normal University and worked in Taiwan for almost ten years as a magazine editor and television host. In addition to his work for WHGC, Mr. Roberts is an adjunct professor at Trinity Law School and California Baptist University.