

Morph into the Career You Want

By Eleanor Southers

REASONS MANY ATTORNEYS ARE DISSATISFIED WITH THEIR CAREERS:

For decades, numerous attorneys practiced in the same areas of law for most of their lives, just as the employees at large corporations did the same work until retirement.

Then big corporations downsized or merged, and commerce generally went with the way of more trendy models including lots of technology. Those who couldn't or wouldn't keep up, fell by the wayside with golden parachutes or just plain "downsizing". This left a whole generation scrambling to reinvent themselves. This situation was pretty much the same with lawyers.

We now know that the Millennials will most likely have several different jobs in their lifetimes. These careers might be closely related but not necessarily so. People go back to school late in life to "reinvent" themselves and make themselves more desirable to clients and employers.

People are living longer with a healthier lifestyle, which allows them to work into their later years. You will see attorneys working into their 80s and to retire at 50 or even 65 seems absurd due to money worries or just the plain boredom of total retirement. Still, many attorneys find themselves burdened and become generally dissatisfied with all or part of their job as they work later in life.

This, of course, doesn't mean young or new attorneys are not also unhappy. They have come out of law school into a very different world than most attorneys have known. Trying to find a satisfying career may take many false starts and can be discouraging unless extra planning and care is taken from the minute they enter law school!

LAWYERS ARE MORE FORTUNATE THAN OTHERS:

In the legal profession, any age will be a big (but different) advantage. Young attorneys have great knowledge of technology and look to use it in their careers which is a great boon to their clients and employers. Older attorneys have the advantage of years of experience and legal knowledge. They can be trusted to know the answers and have learned how to give great service to their clients. Lawyers can have more flexibility with their hours so they can continue to work part time as they age. Since many of their financial concerns may have decreased, part-time work can still support a comfortable life style.

More importantly, a lawyer's reputation is built through years of doing good work. An older attorney can take that with him or her to any other profession or job they decide to morph into.

Although it doesn't feel like it when you get out of law school, the new lawyer has a multitude of choices. He or she can choose to become a corporate attorney, go into Big Law or even become a solo. More opportunities include public service, international law, litigation or transactional, non-profit and many, many other fields.

Some of the time, lawyers feel that they have been pushed into a particular practice because of outside circumstances (this might be taking over their parent's practice, the need for regular hours, paying back student loans and lack of opportunities in their community). In reality, this is seldom true after the first few years. Even during those years there are great choices to be made with careful planning. To set up a strategy to uncover their "best" career is the biggest challenge for most attorneys, no matter how or where they practice law. Most important, that strategy needs to include the opportunity to change the goals when the time is right.

PREPARE TO TRANSFORM YOURSELF:

There is no doubt that there will be changes in your career. Many of you also have added other areas of the law to your firm but normally. I have frequently seen PI Attorneys include Social Security or Bankruptcy or Immigration to their firm's agenda. Sometimes, however, specific changes such as learning how to better market can create the missing satisfaction with the practice and no new areas need be found.

Members of solo and small firms must be able to "change" at a moment's notice. Yes, that awful word: CHANGE. Yes, not only are taxes and death a certainty of life, so is change.

Let's look at some of the reasons for transforming yourself:

- You want to retire but still need or want to earn money.
- The Legislature has impacted your practice drastically.
- You are bored with your present practice.
- You want more family or leisure time.
- You need to move.
- You are caring for a parent or child on a long-term basis,
- An area of your practice has taken a down turn financially.
- You are unhappy but really don't know why.
- You need to earn more money.
- You must slow down because of an illness or physical disability.

Change is obviously a choice (or requirement) for lawyers at any stage of their careers and at any age.

WHY DON'T MORE UNHAPPY ATTORNEYS MORPH?

There are many attorneys that think change will only bring something worse than they already are experiencing. This is a natural human reaction when attorneys have spent so much time and effort on their careers. Also, lawyers hesitate to get help when they are in trouble for fear of being seen as weak or inept. This can lead them into sticking with the same old circumstances but still wanting more satisfaction.

One big threat to change is denial. Convincing themselves that the situation can be “lived with” or that it doesn’t even exist is tantamount to never starting on a solution. Defeating denial is the first step to change.

Some of the career choices attorneys that I have known who didn’t want to completely retire have made include:

- Mediation Practice/Arbitration Practice
- Coaching (me)
- Consulting work in their area of expertise.
- Becoming Expert Witnesses
- Virtual law/technology consultant
- Contract attorney
- Write a book or become a legal reporter.
- Teacher, either in a law school or community college
- Start a small business
- Administrative law judge.
- Consulting in a particular area.

So, if Morphing seems right for you, give it a try. I have given you new insight on the importance of, not only recognizing, but making plans to change your career path. If you still have questions give me a call: (310) 749-1944. Let's talk.