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OREGON ATTORNEY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

# *IN SIGHT* for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## SEVEN THINGS TO DO WHILE YOUR DREAM JOB MATERIALIZES

I've always felt that looking for a job is one of the most difficult tasks on the face of the earth. Active job seekers expose themselves to scrutiny and rejection with each application or résumé they send. Inactive (or underactive) job seekers may suffer guilt and self-criticism because they're not doing what they "should" be doing. Rejection and self-recrimination are not attractive alternatives. So what can you do until you find that perfect union of your skills and a great employer's needs? (Hint: Matching your skills to an employer's needs should be your primary job-search objective.)

First, ask yourself at the outset, "Is my ladder propped against the right wall?" Maintaining self-confidence and a sense of one's competence is difficult enough for job seekers with a clear direction and purpose. It can be next to impossible for those whose career goals are unclear.

Some people scramble to the top of their professional ladder, only to discover they've arrived somewhere they don't really want to be. This happens to many lawyers. They may have hated law school, or they played the part of the good soldier and powered through, despite misgivings. Then they wake up two, seven, or 25 years later and realize they're miserable. Some meaningful soul-searching can prevent (or end) this tragedy. (And yes, it is a tragedy when a person must grit her or his teeth just to get through the day, year after year after year.) So test the hypothesis that you really want to work – or continue working – as a lawyer. This requires brutal honesty with yourself.

Second, work. Do anything that will allow you the freedom to pursue a law job

(assuming you decide that's what you want) for at least two or three hours during the day. It doesn't matter what the job is. You could mow lawns, stock books or grocery shelves at night, be a security guard, type, or do data entry. The point is to be out among the working and the living – hopefully the two aren't mutually exclusive – earning grocery money. The benefits include reducing isolation, exposing yourself to industries you may never experience again, or getting a feel for what it's like to work for yourself.

At this point I can hear that voice inside you saying, "Why should I stock shelves? I'm a lawyer for crying out loud! That's totally beneath me!" Get over yourself. One of the complaints nonlawyers have about lawyers is that they're full of themselves. A huge ego is your prerogative, of course. Just be aware that huge egos alienate people and usually mask a bundle of insecurities. Successful people in all fields usually have a service mentality. With the right attitude, this can be developed at McDonald's just as easily or better than at a law firm. Don't misunderstand – I'm not suggesting a minimum-wage job as a long-term strategy. I know you have student loans and rent to pay. This is an interim, transitional strategy only.

Third, ask for help. Develop a morale maintenance program with your friends and family. Looking for work is difficult, and the "Lone Rangers" have it the worst. Tell everyone you know what you're looking for and ask for suggestions. Ask for the names of those who might know helpful people. Ask a friend or family member to meet with you once a month and "check in" on your progress. Do you find it difficult to ask for

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help? Practice asking for the help you need. Humans are social creatures and are generally happy to help. Remember to draw on available resources. Call the OAAP for assistance and support: 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-6227.

Fourth, give away your time and talents. Volunteer for something. Anything. There may not be a paid position, or you may not have the experience necessary for the job – but ask anyway. Need is everywhere; proximity can work in your favor. Sometimes even answering phones, stuffing envelopes, or emptying the trash can lead to another opportunity – especially in an agency or nonprofit organization.

Fifth, read. Resources abound for people in the job market. See the sidebar for a list of time-tested books and authors offering career guidance.

Sixth, hang out with lawyers. Attend CLEs and make it a point to talk to someone at the seminars. Join your local bar association and volunteer for a committee. Attend state bar section meetings. Get involved with associations affiliated with your practice interests – human resources groups, human rights organizations,

real estate associations, small business organizations, Chamber of Commerce, and the like. If you feel shy, introduce yourself to someone and ask whether he or she has attended the function before.

Seventh, believe in yourself. Do whatever it takes to build a quiet confidence in yourself and your abilities. Keep a journal recording your thoughts and feelings as the days go by. Track the success of your efforts so you can do more of what's working. Ask someone who cares about you to tell you everything that's good about you.

Looking for a job is one of the hardest things you'll ever do. Give yourself credit for what you accomplish and let go of your failings. Do what you can do and don't worry about what you can't do.

Best wishes to you as you continue on your journey.

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*This article appeared in the June 2005 issue of In Sight and has been updated and reprinted with the author's permission. Dr. Nerison is the author of the recent book, Lawyers, Anger and Anxiety: Dealing with the Stresses of the Legal Profession (American Bar Association: 2010).*

## Job-Hunting Resources

- You might begin with the annually updated *What Color Is Your Parachute: A Practical Manual for Job Hunters and Career Changers*, by Richard Bolles.
- Try *Ask the Headhunter: Reinventing the Interview to Win the Job*, by Nick A. Corcodilos, for suggestions on getting interviews and interviewing techniques. Also check the *Ask the Headhunter* Web site at [www.asktheheadhunter.com](http://www.asktheheadhunter.com).
- For recent graduates, Kimm Alayne Walton's books (e.g., *Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams*, 2nd ed.) are good resources.
- For a thoughtful approach to vocation and career choice, read Parker J. Palmer's *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. This is a beautifully written, inspirational book.
- Anything by Barbara Sher (e.g., *Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want*) is great for helping you clarify what you want to do and how to start doing it.
- Julia Cameron's books (e.g., *The Artist's Way*) are also great for helping you maintain balance.
- For those of you who are feeling bad about not being hired – or about being fired – by a large law firm, read Patrick Schlitz's article in the *Vanderbilt Law Review*, "On Being a Happy, Healthy, and Ethical Member of an Unhappy, Unhealthy, and Unethical Profession," 52 VAND. L. REV. 871-951 (1999). Even if you don't want to work for a big firm, read this article. It may help clarify whether you want to work as a lawyer at all.
- For great advice on networking and building relationships, read *Never Eat Alone: And Other Secrets to Success, One Relationship at a Time*, and *Who's Got Your Back: The Breakthrough Program to Build Deep Trusting Relationships That Create Success and Won't Let You Fail*, both by Keith Ferrazzi.
- Also, see "Networking for Introverts," Meloney C. Crawford, *In Sight*, March 2010, and "How to Work a Room: The Art of Networking for Lawyers," by Caren Ullrich Stacey and Veta T. Richardson, *The Young Lawyer*, May 2010.