



IN SIGHT

Helping you improve the quality of your personal & professional life.

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FINDING A LIFE WHILE PRACTICING LAW

The impact of burnout on a lawyer or a firm is so substantial that it should be avoided by all means possible. No work or task is more important than maintaining good professional mental health.

Thoughtful policies can help improve the quality of a lawyer's professional life and minimize the prospect of disillusionment or even withdrawal from the practice of law. To improve your chances for finding a life while practicing law:

- Do what you love; love what you do
- Recognize your niche
- Define success
- Set reasonable expectations
- Fire problem clients
- Plan for time off

LOVE WHAT YOU DO

Create a list of all of your interests that provide real and sustaining personal pleasure or satisfaction. Apply that list of interests to existing or projected practice areas. Remember that law practice is ever-evolving. Think "outside the box" to create a legal practice that could incorporate your identified interests and skills and consider innovative ways to market it. Create a plan to grow such a practice and assure that others in the firm or the office are either equally committed to the change or supportive of the decision.

RECOGNIZE YOUR NICHE

An adjunct to identifying what you would love to do is to identify those areas in which you are especially skilled. Strengths vary widely in the profession and no one lawyer has prowess in all substan-

tive areas. Choose the niche that appears to be the best for meeting the "do what you love" admonition.

DEFINE SUCCESS

It will be impossible to create a satisfying practice unless you have carefully and clearly identified what the measurement(s) of success will be. Write down how you will measure your success and create a system for monitoring your progress.

SET REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

The answer to the question "How do you eat an elephant?" is: "one bite at a time." The process of developing a different professional life is often complex. Break the plan into smaller increments and set the expectations at incremental levels.

FIRE PROBLEM CLIENTS

Evaluate current clients and determine the ones that pose a "problem" for the firm. These clients extract more emotional and intellectual resources than are offset by financial and professional rewards. Then, when professionally and ethically appropriate, "fire" the client.

Such an action, while potentially appearing harsh, may actually benefit the client.

PLAN FOR TIME OFF

Do you know how to relax on vacation? This requires an honest assessment of personality, plus consideration of the type of vacation desired or required. In all instances relaxation requires leaving the office behind. Carrying the problems, troubles, and issues of your clients on vacation will negate any advantages of being away from the office – because you aren't away!

One symptom of this problem is the desire to stay in touch with the office. The first question is – do you need to stay in touch? The answer is often *no!* Leave your itinerary with a trusted member of

your staff in the event of an emergency. Define what constitutes an emergency. Develop alternatives in the event that contact is not possible.

In all cases, recognize the value and purpose of a vacation. Vacations should enable the lawyer to return to the firm refreshed and with a renewed commitment to excellence in the delivery of legal services. Everyone benefits – the firm, the lawyer, and the client.

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