



IN SIGHT

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LOOKING FOR A NEW CAREER PATH?

If you are unhappy with your current work and thinking of making a change, you are not alone. In fact, it may even seem that most of your colleagues are also questioning their career choices.

Lawyers have historically experienced some dissatisfaction with their work. However, in earlier decades people repressed discontent because loyalty and continuity were prized. A newly licensed attorney who worked hard was almost always made a partner after five or six years. Now, partnership is uncertain and lateral transfers are the norm. Loyalty seems to have disappeared – on both sides of the equation.

In times past, many individuals went to law school without a lot of soul searching or active decision-making. They went to please family or friends, or because they viewed law school as a good background for some later step. After a few years of practice, however, some of them realized that they should have given more consideration to such an important decision. Often, the fit was wrong. For some, it may have been because the image of lawyers changed from that of counselor and confidant to intimidating opponent, aggressive litigator, and unemotional combatant – a style not necessarily relished by those with gentle, non-confrontational characters.

For those attorneys who decide to change their careers, the alternatives – both inside and outside of law – are numerous. Law school and law practice are fertile training grounds for desirable skills – communication skills, management skills, creative skills, organizational skills – that can be easily transferred and applied to a wide variety of jobs.

For the majority of lawyers, a radical move out of law is unnecessary. Perhaps all they need is a minor

adjustment such as a change of practice area, size of firm, or location. Or perhaps going in-house to a corporation, bar association, or educational institution is remedy enough.

For some lawyers, the desire to continue in a similar practice on a part-time basis is a sufficient compromise. Or if discomfort is caused by the confrontation necessary in a litigation practice, the conciliatory field of mediation may be the answer. Those attorneys who love the law in its theoretical rather than its practical application can often find contentment working in research and writing positions – with the courts, legal book publishers, or research services.

Some lawyers enjoy working with other lawyers but not practicing law. Companies that provide services to practitioners often prefer to hire lawyers for their ability to communicate with the customer. These companies provide computer and telecommunications consulting, office management, law book or office product sales, lawyer and support staffing, or office design, to mention just a few services.

The majority of attorneys who switch careers go into banking, real estate, insurance, politics, one of the communication fields, or management. However, there are no limits. I have worked with many clients, including lawyers who have chosen to be humor consultants, real estate developers, psychologists, art professors, journalists, humane society presidents, career counselors, chain store owners, and screen writers. If you are contemplating a change, you are in good company.

Career reevaluation and change is stressful and can cause great insecurity. Considering a change may entail working through some very difficult issues, such as change of identity, fear of loss of prestige or respect, lifestyle changes necessitated

by change in income, loss of time and money invested in pursuing a legal education, and fear of the unknown. But it can have extremely positive results. As a former lawyer-turned-administrator emphatically told me, "I have misgivings sometimes when I look at my paycheck but never when I look at my life."

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Adapted from "300+ Things You Can Do With A Law Degree"© by Hindi Greenberg. All rights reserved. More information on this topic will be presented May 12, 2000 at "What Do You Want To Do With Your Law Degree And How To Get There." See page 1 of this issue for more details.

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