



JUNE 2008

Issue No. 70

# IN SIGHT

*for Oregon Lawyers*

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## REASSESSING GOALS NOW THAT YOU'RE A PARTNER

Much of an associate's world revolves around completing assigned projects, striving to meet law firm expectations, and navigating the steep learning curve of practicing law. This busy time in a lawyer's career frequently coincides with raising a family, often leaving little time for career and life planning. These early years of law practice experience often help to clarify your values, interests, and talents.

Becoming a partner in your firm is an ideal time to reassess career and personal goals. Unfortunately, few new partners take advantage of this moment. Most become immediately concerned with their firm's performance criteria, their new responsibilities managing clients and projects (and possibly associates), and the increasing pressure to become rainmakers. While these are legitimate issues and obligations, you would do yourself and your clients a service to also take some time to reflect on your career path and possibly reevaluate your future goals.

It's understandably easy to neglect this self-assessment process. New partners must adjust to their changed role within the firm and extra demands on their time. You may also be performing a precarious juggling act, trying to balance career and family. And when you've finally accomplished what you thought you most wanted, you might be questioning whether you really welcome the additional responsibilities of being a partner. If you change your mind, will all the lost weekends and holidays you spent toiling at your work be wasted? Absolutely not.

Whatever you decide to do next, you've demonstrated a number of important things to yourself: You have the ability to practice law well. You have the interpersonal skills necessary to establish and maintain client relationships. You have self-management, organizational, and planning proficiency. You have shown commitment, dedication, and fortitude.

Take advantage of the opportunity presented by your promotion to partnership to examine both your personal and professional goals and then redirect your energies and actions accordingly. A business development plan designed with your whole life in mind is much more likely to provide success and satisfaction. Here is a process for designing such a plan.

**1. Clarify your life roles and goals.** Consider your roles in all aspects of your life – as attorney, parent, partner, child of an aging parent, friend, community member, and so on. What are your goals in each of these roles? What would you have to do to accomplish these goals? What are some action steps you can take in the next three years to move you toward your goals? The next year? Six months?

**2. Define success for yourself.** Your firm will define success, at least in part, in terms of the profitability of the business you bring in. As you consider what you would like to accomplish during your partnership years, keep in mind that lawyers tend to be most financially successful – that is, profitable – when they are providing service to clients they truly like and respect about matters they value.

If you have no sources of satisfaction other than work, your office will be a place to hide from the emptiness in your life. You're far more likely to be successful in your career if you have close and satisfying relationships outside of work.

There is no definition of success you "should" have. Just be sure the definition you use is your own.

**3. Determine the kind of work and clients that are most fulfilling for you.** Review the work you've done during the past several years. Which clients did you most enjoy working with? What types of matters fascinated you most? Which projects gave you the

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greatest sense of pride and satisfaction? Your answers will provide the basis for your client development plan.

Enthusiasm and interest are essential for success in your practice. The reasons for this are simple: Excellent professional work requires focus, and without genuine interest, sustained focus is nearly impossible. Excellent client service requires that you genuinely care about your clients and their needs. Clients who experience your genuine interest in their business or personal goals are usually loyal clients. It's really a win-win situation: do what you enjoy, and you're much more likely to do it successfully.

**4. Design your marketing efforts to be consistent with your goals.** Marketing to people you like about issues that fascinate you will most likely generate the kind of revenue that will satisfy both you and your firm. If you've outgrown the kind of work you've been doing up until you made partner, consider whether you can transition to a practice area consistent with your interests.

The quality of client service is affected at every point of contact between firm and client. You'll need to be able to count on your firm to support you by demonstrating concern for clients at every contact point. Most firms want to provide you with the support you need to be successful, but you might have to be assertive in asking for it.

**5. Remember that the essence of marketing is relationship building.** Marketing is neither advertising nor selling. Being good at business development is simply showing a sincere interest in clients and their problems, and a willingness to spend time being helpful to them. Don't sell – help.

**6. Plan your career with your whole life in mind.** Use the action steps you detailed in the first step to fill in your monthly, weekly, and daily planner. Schedule time for your family, time to take care of your personal needs, and time for client development, along with the appointments you typically schedule. You can undo all your good intentions by failing to make and follow through with a specific implementation plan.

If you're doing work that interests you, with people you enjoy, your schedule will be filled with activities that bring you personal and professional satisfaction.

You'll be on your way to accomplishing what you've defined as success.

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