



IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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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-reproach 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.

We've all heard about climbing the ladder of success. The problem is that some people scramble to the tops of their ladders, only to discover they've arrived somewhere they really don't 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 at the outset can prevent 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 re-

ally want to work as a lawyer. This requires brutal honesty with yourself.

Second, work. Do anything that will allow you the freedom to pursue a law job 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, and 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 large law firm. Don't misunderstand – I'm not suggesting a minimum-wage job as a long-term strategy. I know you have huge 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

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- Career Change & Transition
- Gambling Addiction
- Mental Health
- Procrastination & Time Management

A free, nonprofit, confidential program for you.

people. Ask someone to cook dinner for you once a month and check on your progress. Do you find it humiliating to ask for help? That's a sign in itself that you need some help. Humans are social creatures who need each other; don't fight your nature. Ask for the help you need.

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. 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. For recent graduates, Kimm Alayne Walton's books (e.g., *Guerilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams*) 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 written by Barbara Sher is great for helping you clarify what you want to do and how to start doing it. Her four books are: (1) *Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want*; (2) *Live the Life You Love: In Ten Easy Step-by-Step Lessons*; (3) *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It*; and (4) *It's Only Too Late If You Don't Start Now: How to Create Your Second Life at Any Age*. 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 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.

Sixth, hang out with lawyers. Attend CLEs and

make it a point to talk to someone at the seminar. 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 they've attended this 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. And if you find yourself feeling demoralized and discouraged, call one of the OAAP attorney counselors. Don't wait until you're so depressed that you can't get out of bed. (If you're already there, call now.)

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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