



December 2012

Issue No. 88

# *IN SIGHT* for Oregon Lawyers and Judges

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH A LAW DEGREE?

If you're like most lawyers facing a career transition or looking for a job, your first thought is, "What's out there?" That is, what jobs or opportunities are available that I could do with my legal background? Although you will definitely also need to consider the market, a very successful strategy for finding a satisfying job is to *first* take time to do some self-assessment and fully explore what you really want in a job.

In a tight job market, the "what-do-you-want" question might have limited appeal. At a time of legal restructuring, the more pressing questions might be what jobs are out there and what jobs can you get. While these questions are important, they won't necessarily help you find greater career satisfaction.

Whether you are looking for your first legal job or a complete career change, the steps in the career exploration process are basically the same:

1. Discover your career identity.
2. Develop your job criteria.
3. Consider your circumstances.

The first step, finding your personal career identity, is an exploration that requires assessment of yourself and the experiences you want as a regular, ongoing part of your work. It is composed of five basic elements – values, psychological needs, communication style, motivated skills, and career interests. The more of these elements that fit your job, the more satisfied you will be.\*

If you have a job and want to make a change, you may know that you are

unhappy but you may also be unable to pinpoint exactly what is wrong. You may know that you dislike a few aspects of your job, your firm, or the law, but somehow these complaints don't really fully capture the basis of your discontent. Although your unhappiness may drive you to want to make a complete break with your legal career, it will be a good investment in yourself to first make time to discover your own career identity. Your exploration and self-assessment may lead you to affirm your desire for a complete change, or you may discover that a small or moderate change in your work circumstances will make the needed difference in your career satisfaction.

When you take the time to develop your career identity, you will have a solid foundation from which to look for a job or career that is a better fit. You will have greater clarity about yourself and your career, which will bring many additional benefits to you, including:

- You may find that you only need to make some adjustments, rather than a major change in your career.
- People you network with will find it easier to remember you and help connect you with other people and opportunities.
- You will be more attractive to potential employers.
- You will be more likely to find a job that fits you and is satisfying.

A second important step to the career exploration process is developing your job criteria. This means understanding not only what you have to offer an employer, but also what you want and need in a work

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experience. Based on the elements of your career identity, you will need to create a checklist of your own personal criteria for career satisfaction. You'll identify what you must have, what you'd like to have, and what you must avoid in order to achieve job satisfaction. Later, you can use this checklist to evaluate various job possibilities in general, as well as specific positions within particular firms or organizations during your job search.

The third step in the exploration process is to consider your circumstances. After you identify job possibilities that appeal to you, you will need to consider other factors such as geographical location, availability of jobs, need for further training, minimum required income, family needs and desires, and so on. Balancing your ideal job criteria with other more practical considerations will help you to formulate your job search strategy.

Whether you plan to stay in law, move to a law-related job, or leave law far behind, these steps will prove to be a winning strategy. Once you take the time to work through these steps, you will find career satisfaction much easier to attain.

To help lawyers work through these steps toward finding a satisfying job and career, the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program is offering a career seminar on March 1, 2013. (See the box on page 1 for more information.)

\*Based on: The Lawyer Career Satisfaction Model<sup>SM</sup> as discussed in *The New What Can You Do With a Law Degree?* by Dr. Larry Richard and Tanya Hanson (Seattle: LawyerAvenue Press/DecisionBooks, 2012).