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Personal Vision: How To Make Your Vocation Your Vacation

A Personal Vision is a holistic map of what you are hardwired to do. It opens the doors to your creative insight, energy and talent and puts you on the road to success and satisfaction.

***By Anne Whitaker
Counsel On Call***

You are already successful. You graduated from law school and are a lawyer. This may have happened recently, three years or 20 years ago. No matter where you are in your career – a newly-minted lawyer or a seasoned practitioner with a long list of clients – you are a success in the eyes of many people. Simply doing what it takes to succeed in law school earns you much respect and is evidence that you are an achiever. If you have also practiced a number of years then you are even more successful-looking to the outside observer.

Are You Happy And Satisfied With Your Career?

The question is: do you feel successful? Put another way, is your career a success for you? Success means many things to many people, but there are two things that most people include in their definition of success - happiness and satisfaction. Are you happy and satisfied with your career? Is it challenging and

fulfilling? Does it bring you joy? Are you living a life you love? Most lawyers do not take time out from their busy day to ask themselves those questions until they are burned out, or they wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat and realize that how they are spending their lives and energy feels utterly meaningless.

If you are happy and satisfied with your career, does that mean you should stop reading this article? Absolutely not. Why? Because what makes you happy today may not make you happy several years from now and you will need to know what to do at that career turning point. The only certainty is change.

However, if you are not satisfied with your career or job, you are certainly not alone. 20% of lawyers surveyed by the American Bar Association in 1990 said they were dissatisfied with their jobs. [1] A more recent survey by the Michigan Bar found 47% of lawyers surveyed were dissatisfied with their jobs. [2] 70% of California lawyers who were informally polled by the *California Lawyer* said they would change careers if given the chance. [3]

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What do you do if you are among the ranks of the unhappy and unsatisfied? You have several choices. You can suffer silently and hope things will change. You can update your resume and apply for a position with another firm or corporation hoping that it will be different and better. Or you can take time to figure out what career or position is the right one for you before you go any further. Mark Twain said “The secret of success is making your vocation your vacation.” How do you make your vocation your vacation so that your work is interesting, energizing and exciting?

The key to having a successful, rewarding career that truly fits you is to create your own Personal Vision. Having a Personal Vision is the number one predictor of success – more predictive than IQ, socioeconomic status, or even education. A Personal Vision is a holistic map of what you are hardwired to do. It opens the doors to your creative insight, energy and talent and puts you on the road to success and satisfaction. It can help you move from being in a stress cycle to being more balanced.

This is not the touchy-feely, pie-in-the-sky kind of personal vision that the words may bring to mind. Instead, what I am talking about is an image of yourself in a future in which you are using your most powerful talents; doing work that is meaningful and fulfilling. It is an image of what you have identified as your ideal life and career, what you want to accomplish and what you want for work/life balance. It connects you to your future and has a definite structure and form. It is a template you create for yourself that helps you make decisions about what to

do next to get what you really want. This can help you at each turning point of your life – times when you make decisions about your life and career. It can also help you every day to make those small decisions that add up to the big ones, and that affect whether your life feels balanced or out of control and stressed.

Deborah Arron, the first lawyer to write and speak openly about career alternatives for lawyers, asked the question “What can you do with a law degree?” in the late 1980s and wrote a book about it. Her simple answer then is still very true today: “Anything you want to do.” The trick is figuring out what you really want to do and where your true talents are. In other words, creating your Personal Vision.

It’s tricky because this is not something we are taught how to do in law school, where the focus is on making students fit a certain mold. The great news is you can figure out what your best career is – it’s never too late to embark on this journey. You just need to know how.

Components Of A Personal Vision

Although it helps you see into the future, your Personal Vision must be grounded in the present and include every significant aspect of who you are, what you are hardwired to do and what you want from your life. To be effective, it must take a whole picture of you into account, not just one or two aspects of your life. There are eight factors that need to be considered, and each is a vitally important component of making the right choice for yourself. We call this The Whole Personal Technology® and it consists of the following elements of your life.

- Your Natural Talents and Abilities – how you are hardwired , what you naturally do well. If you work against your abilities, work feels like labor and tasks can feel like torture. If you work with them, everything is easier and more fun. Talents are completely different from acquired knowledge, skills, and interests. You cannot change them and you need to know what they are.
- Your Skills and Life Experience – what you have learned in life, your expertise. Unlike natural abilities, which are set for life, skills can be practiced and learned. On the flipside, if you don’t use them you can lose them.
- Interests and Fascinations – what draws your attention, gives passion and energy to your life.
- Interpersonal Style – your personality and preferences, how you interact with those around you.
- Your Values – what you think is worth doing in life, what you hold most near and dear to your heart.

- Your Goals – what you want to do in life, what you want to accomplish.
- Your Family of Origin – messages about work and success that you received from your family.
- Your Stage of Adult Development – whether you are at a turning point or in a building stage has a tremendous impact on how you view choices and make decisions.

Once you have explored these eight areas of your life, the next step is to integrate what you have learned to form your Personal Vision. Over the next several issues in this series, we will take an in-depth look at the eight factors and how you can create a Personal Vision for yourself. I have used The Whole Person Technology® with many of my lawyer clients and have applied it to my own life as well. It's an exciting methodology that anyone can use and it will change the way you view your career path choices forever.

An Inside-Out Approach To Career Planning Can Seem Alien To A Lawyer

You may be thinking you don't have the time to do this or this sounds too right-brained. If you are, I am not surprised. Most lawyers are bottom-line and action-oriented – we have to be to make it through law school. However, that approach does not serve you well in the big-picture, career planning arena of your life. It will help you later on when it is time to take action, but the first step is to slow down and look inside. You need to take an inside-out approach to finding your answers.

I want you to treat yourself and your career the same as you would treat your most important client. You wouldn't think of handling an important lawsuit or transaction without first learning as much as you could about the case or matter from the client's perspective. You would focus on the relief you could get or the deal you could negotiate considering the facts most favorable to your client.

Similarly, when creating your Personal Vision, you will need to focus on discovering what is right for you and not merely on what opportunities might be out there. You will analyze your preferences, what motivates you, your abilities, the kind of environment and type of work that best suits you before you explore what is available.

Compare this to the opposite approach I see many people take. Many lawyers ask where they can go with their experience, who will hire them, and tend to be reactive rather than proactive. It is more powerful to have a clear and positive picture of the kind of career you desire, with whom you want to be working and

what you will be doing. It's amazing what a difference this makes in getting what you really want in your life. It carries you through setbacks, dilemmas, challenges and choices. It keeps you from getting sidetracked, derailed, and defeated. It ensures that you will be able to look back one day and say that you got to do what you really wanted to do, and had fun along the way.

There are other benefits to having a career that really fits you. You enjoy better health, a longer life, and more vitality. You have better relationships with those around you. You are more successful and productive because people who enjoy their work put more of themselves into their careers. Imagine waking up in the morning with excitement and enthusiasm for the coming workday.

How can you get there from where you are now? We'll start down that path with the next article, so stay tuned.

NOTES

1. *Running From the Law*, Deborah Arron, 1989, updated in 2001
2. *Keeping Good Lawyers: Best Practices to Create Career Satisfaction*, M. Diane Vogt and Lori-Ann Rickard
3. *Alternative Careers for Lawyers*, Hillary Mantis, 1997
4. *Don't Waste Your Talent: The 8 Critical Steps to Discovering What You Do Best*, Bob McDonald, Ph.D. and Don Hutcheson, 2000, Longstreet Press.
5. *What Can You Do With A Law Degree? A Lawyer's Guide to Career Alternatives Inside, Outside & Around the Law*, Deborah Arron, 1999, Niche Press

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