

# The Complete Lawyer

Cover Blurb:

## **Your Personal Vision Statement: A Template For Change**

You can have your life and career your way

**By Anne Whitaker**



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## **Your Personal Vision Statement: A Template For Change**

***By dreaming of your ideal life and job, and analyzing how you can make your dreams a reality, you'll create a template for change***

By Anne H. Whitaker

*This is the ninth in a series of ten articles exploring The Eight Critical Success Factors <sup>1</sup> necessary to create a Personal Vision for your life and career. If you are new to the series, you may want to take a look at the previous articles. (See TCL Volume 2: [Number 1](#), [Number 2](#), [Number 3](#), [Number 4](#), [Number 5](#), and Volume 3: [Number 1](#), [Number 2](#), [Number 3](#).)*

**"I have learned this, at least, by my experiments; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."**

**- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden***

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Are you living your life your way? Is your career what you want it to be? How do you feel when you think about going to the office? Is it with a sense of excitement and anticipation for what you will be doing, or does it feel like drudgery and something that you have to do to make money? This series is all about what you can do to ensure you have the kind of life you want—where you wake up and look forward to your day, and at the end of the day feel fulfilled and satisfied with what you have accomplished. You can have your life and your career your way.

Over the past months, I have taken you through a process of thinking about various aspects of your life by considering eight critical success factors that make up your Personal Vision. I hope you have been able to do all or even some of the exercises and explored how you envision your life, picking up information about yourself along the way. The next step is to combine what you have learned and integrate those pieces of information into a Personal Vision Statement. Your Personal Vision Statement is a unique, complete expression of what is important to you and how you want your life to be. It will be the guide for crafting your life going forward.

### **You Need To Both Analyze and Synthesize**

The creative process for creating a Personal Vision uses both the left and the right sides of the brain. Almost all of the exercises I have recommended previously have tapped into the left side of your brain, the part that is logical and arranges things in order. As a lawyer, you use that part of your brain even more than most people. Every time you analyze a client's case, research, write a memo or brief, prepare for a deposition or for trial, or simply debate, you are relying heavily on the left side of your brain. The left brain operates like a computer and works through words; it plans, figures things out and tells you what makes sense.

But you also have to engage the right side of your brain, which thinks holistically, solves problems in a nonlinear fashion, and discovers new ways to put together disparate elements. The right brain is not tied to the present, to facts or realities; it has insight into new possibilities and can solve different problems simultaneously. I'm sure you have had times when you are more relaxed and all of a sudden a solution to a problem you have been wrestling with springs to mind, seemingly out of nowhere. That is your right brain providing you with an insight. It has been behind the scenes subconsciously working on the problem for you.

Many lawyers I work with are skeptical at first when I talk about using their right brains. But the right brain can be a great friend when you are creating a life that is truly yours rather than continuing down the path that others have set for you. You'll need both sides of your brain to write your Personal Vision Statement—and you can do it in three steps.

## **Step One: Gather Information**

First you need to put your left brain back to work again. Gather together the results of all the exercises you have done. (If you have not done them all, then take some time and complete them before doing this.) Spread them out in front of you so that you can see what you have written. There should be information about you in all eight areas: your abilities (hard-wiring), personality, skills, interests, values, goals, stage of adult development, and family of origin. You can create a Personal Vision Statement without one of those areas, but it will be incomplete. It's very much like preparing a recipe and leaving out an important ingredient—you won't get what you really want.

Once you have the information in view, think about what your purpose is for creating a Personal Vision Statement and write that at the top of a blank sheet of paper. Some examples are "What I need to be satisfied in my life" or "What I need to have balance in my career and personal life." Next, take your time and look through the information you have gathered about yourself in each of the eight areas. Select the key things in each area that you want to have in your life and write them on your sheet. You may also identify some key things you know you must avoid, so put those down, too. For those who crave more organization, create a grid with a "must have" and "must avoid" box for each success factor. However you do it, complete your list and then set it aside for the moment.

## **Step Two: Conduct a Guided Imagery Exercise**

Now, switch gears and focus on your right brain. It already has been working behind the scenes over the past months, during the self-discovery phase, as you completed the exercises.

To access the insights you've gained, try the following guided imagery exercise:

Make sure you're alone and that you won't be disturbed. Sit in a comfortable position, take some deep breaths and relax your muscles, and tune out the world around you for the time being.

Then, ask yourself to envision your ideal day. Imagine that you woke up one morning and found that someone had left you millions of dollars, no strings attached. You have a virtually limitless bank account that you can draw on any time you want with no need to worry about earning money again. You can start each day asking yourself, "What do I want to do today?"

Now read over the following text and questions and think about them each, without writing anything down. See what images come to mind as you ask yourself the questions. You can also speak and record your answers and play it back while you listen with your eyes closed.

“Imagine yourself in your bed waking up in the morning. Imagine yourself thinking about your day ahead and feeling curious, excited and energetic about what is to come. Today is your ideal day.

- What is your relationship like with your spouse or partner?
- What is your relationship like with your children?
- What is it like with your parents?
- Who are your friends?
- What things do you do together? What do you talk about?
- How do you feel about your life?

Now describe what a typical day would be like and picture yourself preparing for your day, however you would like to.

- What would your routine be?
- Where would you go?
- What would give your life and career meaning?

Imagine what your work day surroundings are like.

- Where do you work?
- How is your schedule arranged?
- What are you doing?
- Who is in your day?
- Which talents are you using?
- What are you working to accomplish and what are your activities?
- How much variety do you have?
- What is the pace of work like?
- How much challenge is there?

What gives your day and life the most meaning? What would be the most important thing you would do with your life?”

This is the end of the guided imagery.

Open your eyes and write down, tape record, or tell someone all that you can remember about your answers to the questions. (This brings your left brain into the process as it translates what the right brain has summoned up and is trying to communicate.) Include any images that came to mind with as much detail as you can; don't leave anything out even if you don't understand its meaning. It does not have to make sense right now.

You may have to repeat this exercise or try additional integrative exercises before you understand the message your right brain is trying to give you. (I'd be happy to send you some other guided imagery exercises if you email me.) I hope the

ideas and images you gain from them will help you start to crystallize a vision—an image of what you want your future to look like and how you want to live in it.

### **Step Three: Write Your Personal Vision Statement**

Even if the details of what you've learned so far are unclear, you can use the left side of your brain to start to develop your Personal Vision Statement. Refer to what you have written for the exercises above and think about how you want your life to be. Picture it as if you are living it already.

Start writing your Personal Vision Statement by describing that life in detail in the present tense. For example, write, "I am...", "I have...", "My family is...", and "My career includes..." Make sure you incorporate all eight factors, and include who is in your life, how you spend your time, and what you are doing for work (both paying and non-paying). Afterwards, you can create a vision statement focused just on your career, but first craft one about your whole life. This will probably take a great deal of reflection and refinement, so don't expect it to come out fully developed the first time.

### **A Personal Vision Statement Helps You Make Concrete Changes In Your Life**

This statement can help you in many ways. One of my clients, Keith (2), realized from the exercises that he had chosen the right career path but needed to make some focused and strategic changes in the way he was practicing law. His Personal Vision Statement was his template for those changes; it helped him add meaningful and interesting aspects to his practice and let go of some of the more tedious aspects. His feelings about his work changed dramatically and he was able to move out of the stress cycle into the balance cycle without revamping his entire life.

Another client, Melissa(3), was at a turning point. She was ready to leave the practice of law, and used her Personal Vision to craft what her new life needed to look like. The insights she gained from doing the exercises gave her some creative ideas to explore. Using her Personal Vision as a template for making choices about her next steps, she eventually left law for a new career that was more fulfilling.

If you still are vague about what it is you want to do, or you have some ideas but are not sure if they are pure fantasy or real possibilities, take heart: there is a process that you can go through to clarify your ideas and insights. We will explore those in the next article when we also discuss ways to turn your dream into reality.

In the meantime, unplug from the day-to-day routine when you can and tap into your creative side. You may be pleasantly surprised at the new ideas that come to mind—get ready to listen.

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## Notes

1. McDonald, Bob, Ph.D., and Hutcheson, Don, E., *Don't Waste Your Talent: The 8 Critical Steps to Discovering What You Do Best*, The Highlands Company, 2005.
2. and 3. Keith and Melissa are real clients whose names have been changed.