

## ABA REMARKS

### TOP ISSUES TO MASTER FOR A THRIVING CAREER

**Topics:** Avoiding Isolation and burnout, managing re-entry after a hiatus, finding flexibility and balance.

**Context:** More than 80% of new lawyers will leave their workplace within 5 years.

- In private law firms there is tremendous focus on bringing in clients as well as practicing law.
- Partners that don't continue to produce new business matters may be asked to leave.
- In this culture of 24/7 responsiveness, lawyers are often expected to give more of their lives/souls to their workplace than in past generations.
- Intelligent, feeling, people can get bored or fatigued by the constant negotiating and fighting, constant pressure to produce, and working in narrow specialized niches that justify high rates.

People are living longer lives so what was once regarded as retirement age now looks more like a mid-career shift. *It is challenging to find and maintain career success—and by that I mean what you find satisfying and enjoyable. Something besides fear that makes you want to get out of bed in the morning.*

I've spent a number of years interviewing lawyers in all stages of their career in all kinds of practices and workplace settings for the Boston Bar Association and the Massachusetts Women's Bar Association and I led a project that involved many of managing partners in Boston firms on the future of their law firms and lawyers. Based on my research, interviews, and discussions with hundreds of lawyers in all kinds of practices over the past decade, I offer you a couple of tips when thinking about how to combat isolation and burnout, work towards balance and make career changes.

- (1) Remember why you became a lawyer. Identify what the themes were--- to do good? Respectability? To make enough money to have a stable life? To have a varied mental life learning lots of different things? Whatever it is, there are certain themes that will still be an important part of who you are and what you want. Even if being a lawyer in your current position is radically different than what you thought your life would be, part of you still knows why you thought it a good idea to go to law school. When you remember or figure out what that is, it will help you to see what you want from your career and your life going forward.

- (2) Take time to remember what *you feel in your heart* to be success. What you wanted from a career and your life as a whole. Tack towards this. I have interviewed a lot of people at various stages of their career in lots of different positions. Many were disillusioned or unhappy with their jobs and lives. Some were feeling depressed and felt trapped. But nearly all of them were able, upon reflection, to tell me what they wanted from their lives and careers. When I talked to them four or five or six years later almost all of them had made changes to bring their lives closer to what they had said they wanted, although many couldn't remember what they said in our interview. From this I learned that people who do not let their workplaces or bosses or work cultures define success will in time be happier, more self-reliant and able to move from a poor fit (or what has become a poor fit) to a better fit. It may take time, but I have seen a great many people in difficult situations they felt were intractable make changes that led them to greater career/life happiness and feelings of success.
  
- (3) Some things change. For example, my old law firm firm's mix of clients and practice groups changed. And my own desire to spend more time on different sorts of writing became stronger and stronger. Accept that things change in a way that you may not want or isn't fulfilling and work to let them go. Some things are true for you and will not change. Hold fast to these. *Take time to think about what changes and what doesn't for you, and use this to help guide you. Don't think that what you need or want can't work. Today's market has less security but more flexibility.*

Last, but not least, take time each year to think about the issues we are talking about today. Write down what you want for yourself ten years into the future. No one else will be able to make your life-- or even your work life and career--- give you what you want as well as you can. And you can't make them work if you spend all of your time responding to the next crisis, alleged opportunity, pending disaster, or plea from someone else for your help.