



OAAP

MAY 2007

Issue No. 65

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# IN SIGHT

*for Oregon Lawyers*

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH YOUR LAW DEGREE?

Do you wish you could feel happier in your work, but you know something is wrong? If you answered yes, you are not alone. There are many lawyers who are questioning whether the job they currently hold is the right one for them, or whether they should even stay in the legal field. Generally, for every ten lawyers who say they are unhappy with their work, at least four eventually carve out a comfortable niche in a job within or related to the law. Only two actually leave the law and move into other fields.

The balance of those ten – four lawyers – fall into the following categories: one, after researching the alternatives, makes a reasoned choice to continue in his or her current legal job; one decides it is the wrong time financially or emotionally to make a change; and the last two spend a short time thinking about a career move, then decide it takes too much effort and continue unhappily in their jobs.

But if you are one of those individuals who does want to cultivate increased job satisfaction, it is beneficial to spend some time reflecting on your reasons for wanting to leave your job. You might come to the conclusion that you don't have to completely leave the profession, but instead can find a legal job that better fits your abilities, interests, and work style. Maybe all you need is a minor adjustment to your current working situation to remedy the frustrations – perhaps moving to a different firm, area of law, type of client, or community will suffice.

Those individuals who have worked at only one or two law offices are often surprised at the varied dynamic of other offices and practice specialties. They think, incorrectly, that all law prac-

tices are like the one where they are unhappily working. In many work situations, it is the intraoffice relations that cause work to be enjoyable or contribute to its aggravations. If you are dissatisfied with your work environment, talk to attorneys in other firms about their office culture and relationships to discover whether your current work situation might not be a good fit for you. As a result of this research, you may find that your discomfort isn't really with the law, but with your colleagues.

If collegiality isn't the problem, perhaps a move to an alternative practice – one that removes some of the factors causing you stress – would be enough. Ask other lawyers about the daily routine, the stresses, the benefits, and the growth and income potential in their areas of practice. For example, if your discomfort is caused by the confrontation inherent in a litigation practice, switching to a business or corporate transactional practice may be the answer. Keep in mind that various practice specialties often require different work styles and personality types. A lawyer who enjoys plaintiff's personal injury work, handling intense negotiations, and conducting trials would probably be bored with the detail and documentation of an estate planning practice. Conversely, a quiet, methodical, contemplative thinker might be constantly traumatized running in and out of court as a public defender or district attorney, but might thrive when drafting detailed contracts or researching complex environmental regulations. Investigate different practice areas that might more comfortably fit your work and personality style.

You can also find many opportunities to work as a lawyer outside the narrow confines of traditional law firms. If you love the law in its theoretical rather than practical application, you may find contentment working in a research and writing position – with the courts,

legal book publishers, or legal research services. If you like to operate as part of a team, to further the business of an employer, and to counsel and work preventively, then seek out an in-house position. You can also find legal work as a litigator, a transactional attorney, or in-house counsel, within nonprofit organizations, bar associations, universities, colleges, or with the biggest legal employer – the government.

Individuals who decide to examine the various options outside of law are often very surprised at how their legal training has developed useful, transferable skills that are much in demand in the workplace. Legal education and work provides excellent training in analytical thinking, communication, writing, and persuasiveness – all skills that can be used in many endeavors.

Large numbers of lawyers who switch careers move into politics, real estate, banking, finance, or communications. Others travel even farther afield. Lawyers have transitioned into humor consultants, retail store owners, psychologists, small business owners, teachers, risk managers, screenplay writers, investigators, bicycle tour leaders, editors, publishers, and massage therapists, among many other things. Any interesting career option that exists probably has at least one former lawyer already involved in it. Your options are limited only by preference, imagination, ambition, and the willingness to spend the time and energy necessary to investigate and cultivate your next professional incarnation.

If you are reflecting on your career and want ideas on how to redirect or redefine your career path, consider attending the OAAP seminar, “What Do You Want to Do With Your Law Degree and How to Get There.” (See the box on page 4 for information.) The seminar will address possible reasons for job dissatisfaction and how to evaluate your current job and create satisfaction in your current position. It will also address how to research career options related to the law or outside the law.

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Lawyers in Transition

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