



# IN SIGHT for Oregon Lawyers

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

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## TRANSFORM YOUR PRACTICE WITH TRANSFORMING PRACTICES

Many lawyers today are experiencing a growing dissatisfaction with the practice of law. Increasing demands for more billable hours and a loss of collegiality and professionalism are frequently mentioned as reasons why some attorneys find themselves “running from the law.” Others cite a sense of emptiness in their daily routine: meeting challenge after challenge, but never truly resolving anything or producing something of meaning to them. Many feel separated from the ideals that led them to become lawyers and, ultimately, separated from the profession, their colleagues, and their clients.

In many ways modern life has become more complex – complete with information overload and a rapid-fire pace reflected in both our work and leisure activities. This tendency to multi-task and to move on to the next result is not limited to law practice. However, when the emphasis on intellect, rationalization, and detached analysis (a hallmark of legal education and valued skills for practicing attorneys) is added to these accelerated life demands, many lawyers feel as though something is seriously wrong.

In his book, *Transforming Practices: Finding Joy and Satisfaction in the Legal Life*, attorney Steven Keeva suggests that the solution to these problems is to reframe our concept of a legal career in a way that includes meaning and balance, rather than to abandon the practice of law as a structure beyond repair. Through personal stories and sample exercises, Keeva shows that we can inject meaning

into our professional lives by getting in touch with our authentic selves and reflecting on our core values. Why *did* we enter the legal field? Have we abandoned our original values, or did we adopt someone else’s agenda? What is truly important to us, and is that reflected in our daily lives?

The process of answering these questions can be found in various contemplative techniques like yoga, meditation, and mindfulness that may seem out of place in a “strictly business” model. Yet, at the center of these practices lie valuable skills that enhance productivity as well as the quality of life. Who could not find a benefit in actively listening to our clients, colleagues, and family members? What if we focus on the events of the current moment, rather than constantly on the next catastrophe? If we emphasize service, perhaps we would view clients as people rather than problems.

Keeva proposes a model of “integrative” or “holistic” law that he describes as “an orientation toward law practice that shuns the rancor and blood-letting of litigation whenever possible; seeks to identify the focus of conflict without assigning blame; encourages clients to accept responsibility for their problems and to recognize their opponents’ humanity; and sees in every conflict an opportunity for both client and lawyer to let go of judgment, anger, and bias and to grow as human beings.” (*Transforming Practices*, p. 139.)

This major paradigm shift may not work for everyone. But whether you embrace all of the message or only part of it, Keeva suggests that each of us can make the choice to change our work life by ex-

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amining these questions. Exercising choices in how you structure your day, the type of clients you represent, and how you treat those clients may revitalize your work life and reduce your disenchantment. Meaning and pleasure in your work can be regained, or perhaps discovered in a new way.

If you are interested in pursuing the ideas discussed in this article, call the Oregon Attorney Assistance Program. We provide support through career workshops and referrals to community resources.

### **INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?**

Steven Keeva's book, *Transforming Practices: Finding Joy and Satisfaction in the Legal Life*, is an ABA Journal Book published by Contemporary Books, 1999. He is an assistant managing editor for the ABA Journal. His ABA Journal column, *On Life and Practice*, and his website, [www.transformingpractices.com](http://www.transformingpractices.com), provide additional resources and insight.