

Considering an Alternative Career

By Chet Olsen, Esq.

One thing that most lawyers have in common is that they don't want to be lawyers. It's almost part of the lawyer culture to be constantly searching for something new and different. We are inspired by stories of former lawyers who go out and started airlines or produced television shows. We tell ourselves that's how we want to put our legal education to work.

Producing television programs may or may not be in your future, but at one time or another, you have probably been intrigued by an advertisement for one of those seminars focusing on non-legal careers for attorneys. These ads are placed by individual career counselors and career counseling companies that specialize in helping lawyers escape the law. I may be exaggerating a bit, but the names of these companies' seminars are typically "A Million and One Things You Can Do with a Law Degree" and "Lawyers Who Quit the Law and Ended Up Marrying Michelle Pfeiffer."

If you attend these seminars and/or read books on these topics, you will get some of the things you need, but may not get all you were looking to find. In other words, I don't think many people walk out of there saying to themselves, "Hot damn! I now know I was meant to be an astronaut. I've got to call NASA right away."

One of the good things about considering career alternatives outside the law is that it makes you seriously consider how you really feel about being an attorney. If you're unhappy with your current career situation, is it the law you have an issue with, or is it something else? There are several things that could be that "something else."

1. Your own situation. Maybe there are not a million and one of them, but there are many options available to you in your current profession. Working in the D.A.'s office could be as different from being a bankruptcy attorney in a large firm as it is from many of the non-legal jobs you might consider. In other words, don't give up all you put into becoming a lawyer to become an insurance adjuster when you haven't thought through all your options.

2. Is it law, or is it working that you don't like? If you are just out of law school, it may be that you are having trouble adjusting to working 40 or more hours a week for the first time in your life. Speaking of adjusting, if this is the case, you probably won't enjoy insurance adjusting any more than you do practicing law.

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If you are used to working 40 or more hours a week, that too could be a problem. Especially if the “or more” is “or much more.” In other words, maybe you like the law, but it takes so much out of you that it’s no longer fun or enjoyable. In this case, maybe too much of a good thing is bad, and you just need to manage your workload.

3. Are you itching to start and run your own business? Whether you had a “Rich Dad” or a “Poor Dad,” you may be feeling the urge to start your own business. When most lawyers do this, they think about what kind of business ventures they might want to launch.

4. Finally, it may be that you just need to give yourself some time before making the jump out of law. Your situation might improve, and you’ll enjoy the law more as you get more senior. One of the advantages of paying your dues practicing law is that more and more opportunities present themselves to you. With a few years under your belt, you will have a better sense of what you are looking for and be in a position to do things you were not qualified for just out of law school.

If none of the above applies, it might actually be the case that you were meant to be an astronaut.