



Becoming an Entrepreneur for Your Career

Too many lawyers think it: we believe that if we put our heads down and do good work, success will come to us: superiors will recognize our talent, mentors and clients will be driven to us and we'll achieve all of our ambitions. But unfortunately, hard work alone doesn't get anyone ahead.

You need to also spend time "on" your career - planning for it, developing your practice, and building your network: in essence, becoming an entrepreneur for your career. But what does that mean?

1. First, spend time on your career, not in it.

This is a great saying, explained best by Michael Gerber, author of *E-Myth Mastery: The Seven Essential Disciplines for Building a World Class Company*. What it means is that we all tend to spend time "in" our careers – the day-to-day blocking and tackling of being a lawyer: responding to client demands, handling managerial issues, and performing "technical" tasks (i.e., daily mechanics and skills).

"Most people are just reacting to what comes up," says Gerber, "confusing their ability to react with their ability to lead." But "reacting" isn't enough. To realize your goals and ambitions, you need to spend time "on" your career, thinking strategically about it, clarifying your goals, outlining action plans for achieving those goals, and putting your plans into action.

Start by setting aside small amounts of time on a weekly basis to make time for strategic career planning.

2. Next, take time to assess.

Assess where you are in your career. Ask yourself the big questions: What aspects of my work (and my profession) excite and motivate me? What skills and tasks do I like to do? What am I good at (and what do I need to improve)? What do I want to do more of? What work has been most rewarding? Why was that work so rewarding – was it because of the client, my colleagues, the subject matter or skills involved? What are my priorities? Where do I want to be in 2, 5 and 10 years?

Too often, many lawyers feel they've gotten off track from their goals. But, by taking a step back and assessing your career, you can begin to identify and focus on the aspects of your career which drive and motivate you.

Self-assessment tools such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator can help get you started, clarify work preferences and what types of work and tasks are best suited to your personality. The book *Do What You Are* by Paul Tieger and Barbara Barron-Tieger contains an excellent application of Myers-Briggs to workplace behavior and styles. For lawyers, there are good skills assessment tools in *The Creative Lawyer* by Michael Melcher and *The Lawyer's Career Change Handbook* by Hindi Greenberg (which is relevant even if you aren't considering a career change).

3. Success takes planning.

Successful people know that you can't leave your career development and growth to chance. You must be proactive and get what you need for your career.

Regularly assess your goals and needs for the short, middle, and long term: what skills are needed, how to develop expertise and increase professional visibility, and what mentors and networks are needed at each stage of development.

Create a written action plan you can hold yourself to. Include action plans for (i) developing your skills; (ii) developing your expertise and increasing your visibility within the profession and to potential clients; (iii) expanding your network (both internally and externally); and (iv) client and potential client development. Include weekly, monthly, and annual action plans to ensure follow-through.

Pick two action items you can start working on now and complete within the next three weeks to help kick-start your efforts. One of your goals may be to reconnect with a potential or current client by sending them an email to touch base. Research an organization you'd like to become more involved in. Spend twenty minutes thinking about potential article topics in your area of specialty.

4. Don't eat lunch at your desk.

There's one refrain I hear most from junior partners, senior associates, job-seekers, and those who've started their own practice or business (i.e., so just about everyone): "I wish I had known how important it was to network early in my career. I thought all I needed to succeed was to put my head down and do good work." But, invariably, as we all learn, networking is an essential component of success – no matter what stage of your career you are in.

Networking is not just about getting access to clients – it also gets you access to referral sources, to mentors and advocates, to friends and, potentially, to a great support system.

Look for everyday opportunities to connect with new contacts and reestablish old ones. Think about how you can help your contacts – whom to introduce them to, what information and resources to give them, etc. (Networking is not about what the other person can do for you.)

Each month, dedicate time to networking, focusing on developing current relationships, creating new ones, and becoming involved in professional associations and organizations.

And make sure to go outside your comfort zone. Business development and networking require you to put yourself out there. Go to events where you don't know anyone, deliver a presentation to a group of potential clients, make "the ask" of a potential client.

5. Find a support system to help your efforts.

Put mechanisms in place to help you stay on track with your goals. Use a friend, mentor or coach to keep you accountable. Form a peer group - a group of friends who meet once a month to network and help one another. Have your assistant pull research on your potential and current clients to help you stay abreast of developments in their industries and at their companies (e.g., run weekly or daily news alerts through Yahoo Finance or Google News on relevant topics and companies).

It's okay to start small. Just make sure you start.

Article by Melissa McClenaghan Martin, the President of CWI Advisory Services and a member of the City Bar Career Advancement and Management Committee, 2010.