

FINDING YOUR PASSION DURING TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES

This article summarizes the thoughts presented at an October 16, 2012 program hosted by the City Bar Committee on Career Advancement and Management entitled: *Finding Your Passion In Tough Economic Times*. Program moderator Astrid Baumgardner, a former litigation attorney and Certified Professional Coach, believes that passion is a very important component of career success. Ms. Baumgardner noted that research by positive psychologists like Martin Seligman shows that "happiness breeds success." Optimism brings about greater happiness in a person's career choice. In turn, happiness is positively correlated with career success.

Optimism Breeds Happiness; Happiness Breeds Career Success

According to Ms. Baumgardner, over 200 scientific studies have shown that people who are optimistic and happy in their daily life - including their personal life, professional life, community involvement, and relationships - are more likely to be productive in their jobs and more likely to be promoted. Studies about brain science show that "feel good" hormones are released when a person does what he or she loves.

Although Ms. Baumgardner now has her dream job as head of the Office of Career Strategies of Yale School of Music while simultaneously running her own life coaching business, she did not take a direct route to finding her passion. Ms. Baumgardner started her career as a litigator at a large law firm. She says that although she "majored in getting jobs" at large firms, she was not quite satisfied with her career. Ms. Baumgardner then focused on her personal life and outside interests. For Ms. Baumgardner, it was important to do what she loved. Ms. Baumgardner knew that she was a "people person." She had been a French major in college,

studied abroad in France, and was also an accomplished musician. Since Ms. Baumgartner was very interested in the arts and the non-profit world, she began volunteering at various nonprofits, including the Alliance Francaise and the Sanctuary for Families, where she got to utilize her French skills. She also resumed playing music, and began guest lecturing at music conservatories and law firms. Soon people began to notice her enthusiasm and talent in these areas. Eventually, she started her own business, and was offered a job at the Yale School of Music counseling students about their careers.

Look To Hobbies And Volunteer Activities For Career Inspiration

Another panelist, Debra Vey Voda-Hamilton, found her passion by parlaying her love of animals and her litigation experience into a successful animal mediation practice. Ms. Hamilton started her career as an Assistant District Attorney in Westchester and as an Inspector General with the Metropolitan Transit Authority. She subsequently took a 13-year break from her legal career to raise a family. When she returned to the practice of law, she worked at a small litigation firm doing divorce and real estate law, but was not passionate about it. She started her current practice after noticing that her clients were unhappy with the way their domestic disputes over jointly owned pets were being resolved by the family and housing courts. Ms. Hamilton noticed that her clients were happier when they reached an amicable resolution for her clients, rather than letting courts reach a resolution for them, Ms. Hamilton always had a passion for animals. She bred Irish Setters and had always shown dogs. Soon her business took off.

Dorchen A. Leidholdt, the Director of the Center for Battered Women's Legal Services at Sanctuary for Families, found her passion while growing up in the 1960's. As a politically engaged teenager, Ms. Leidholdt was involved in social justice, anti-war and womens' movements. She was also passionate about art history and English literature. While in graduate school, she volunteered with groups addressing violence against women. After she graduated, she found a job in publishing, but continued volunteering with domestic violence groups. Ms.

Leidholdt's dedication to social justice led her to apply to law school, where she helped form an international NGO look at the problem of female trafficking. When she graduated law school, there were no organizations devoted to the specific work that she wanted to do, so she joined The Legal Aid Society's Criminal Defense Division. There, she represented many women who had been victims of domestic violence. Subsequently, she joined Sanctuary for Families and grew the office from 2 to 26 attorneys.

Ms. Leidholdt suggested that in order to find one's calling, career seekers should engage with the world around them, including those who are less fortunate, and she challenged people to use their sense of injustice to find their passion.

Tap Into Your Inner Voice

So how do people find their passion? According to Ms. Baumgartner, psychologists typically group jobs into three categories: (1) a "job" that is performed purely for the salary; (2) a "career," with the corresponding cache, title, and salary; and (3) a "calling," meaning work involving a sense of engagement that one would perform even without a salary.

Ms. Baumgartner suggested several steps for attorneys struggling to find their passion to take in order to find their calling. (1) Trust your gut instinct and tap into your inner voice, which has been informed by experience over time. Ask yourself questions such as: What did you love to do as a child? What was your dream job growing up? What were your favorite subjects in school? What do you long to do when you are sitting at work and wished you could do something else? What would you do even if you did not get paid for it? (2) Ask yourself what part of your day excited you the most. Was it talking to people? Cooking? Log your daily events in a diary and collect data about the parts of the day that appeal to you, so that you will have that information during moments when you doubt what it is that you enjoy doing. (3) Try spending 30 minutes a week mindfully doing something you love. (4) Seek out opportunities in both your personal and professional life to get involved in projects that appeal to you. Get

involved in pro bono projects, volunteer at non-profits outside of the legal world, take a class that interests you, and read prolifically about different topics in order to stimulate thinking. (5) Start networking. Call up people you admire and get information about what it is like to work in their career fields. (6) Read job descriptions to figure out what you might like to do. (7) Know your strengths. If you do what you are good at, it will more likely be what you love. (8) Every day, write down three things that you are excited about. At the end of the day, check to see if it conformed with your thinking.

Network With People Who Think Differently

Ms. Hamilton added that it was important to surround yourself with people who think differently than you do. That means networking with people who are not lawyers, and people who work in completely different areas than you do. She believes it is important to talk to different people and see what needs they have that are not being met, so if you have a passion that aligns with their needs, you can develop a business plan to meet those needs. Ms. Hamilton also noted that often fear keeps most people from making a career move, and that we need to get control of our fears and move out of our comfort zones in order to find our passions.

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