

New York City Bar Association

TOP FIVE TIPS FOR HAVING A FUN LEGAL CAREER

I'm going to start off with a statement that will shock many attorneys: **WORK SHOULD BE FUN.** Given the number of lawyers born with Type A personalities, many of us begin our careers believing that the practice of law should be hard, and that the harder it is, the "better" we are doing. While hard work is certainly one of the hallmarks of a successful career, the truth is that when you are in the right job and work environment, work is and should be fun.

Here are a few tips I've learned over the years about making the practice of law both enjoyable and fulfilling:

- **Have a positive attitude.** People who rise to the top of an organization almost always have great attitudes (and perhaps equally important, in difficult times, are often the last to go). While this might sound trite, the truth is that people like working with people who have a "can do" attitude, who smile and who generally seem to like what they do. The best way to get experience is to take on a broad range of projects so you can both gain skills and figure out what you like to do and what you are good at (more on that later). The best way to keep getting picked for great teams and projects is to be someone with whom others want to work. That means expressing enthusiasm for what you do, for learning new things and for helping others around you.
- **Be a team player.** While this often goes hand in hand with having a positive attitude, being a team player is a really important part of having a successful and enjoyable career. For starters, working on a team is usually more fun. It is also a great way to learn as you have people off of whom to bounce ideas and to observe how they tackle issues. Lastly, the more people know they can count on you, the more you will become a "go to" person, making you more valuable and more likely to receive the kind of assignments you want to have.
- **Work with people you like.** If you have the attributes described above, chances are you will have increasing opportunities to work with people you genuinely enjoy. The people with whom you like to work will choose you for their teams, and the clients you most enjoy will ask for you on their projects. While of course it is important to learn to work well with people you might not adore (particularly early in your career), one of the most fun parts of becoming a more senior attorney is being able to select the kinds of colleagues and clients with whom you want to work. One of the real indicators of a truly

successful career is: when your phone rings or you receive a message in your inbox, do you look forward to picking it up or opening it? No matter how much money you make, if the answer to this question is not most often a resounding “yes!” you need to make some changes. Having fun, engaging colleagues and clients is the ultimate reward for your hard work.

- **Seek out mentors.** Mentors come in many shapes and sizes, and most likely there isn't going to be only one person who can help you grow as a professional. Look for senior attorneys who have specific skills you want to gain, as well as those who are willing to take the time to teach you. Identify people who can help you hone your technical skills, who can teach you how to be a successful rainmaker, and who can help you navigate the internal and external politics of your organization. These skills probably won't all be found in the same person, so develop strong relationships with several people who can teach you the skills you need to continue to grow as a professional.
- **Figure out what you are naturally good at.** If work is consistently hard for you, you are either in the wrong firm, the wrong career, or both. Take a step back and identify the things at which you are naturally good. Are you a great negotiator? Writer? Adviser? Structurer? Project manager? With what kinds of issues or problems do your colleagues repeatedly come to you? How about your friends? By identifying the skills that are not hard work for you, you can start to differentiate yourself, and build a career from the things at which you naturally excel. This will be both a lot more fun and a lot more rewarding than working hard every day.

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