

BUSINESS & CAREERS

Sick and tired of being a lawyer? There are options

Have you had enough? When you look at the number of hours you work, the financial pressures, clients that are hard to please, workplace conflict, and family and friends asking when they will ever get to see you, do you wonder if this is the life you want? Do you feel the work you are doing is making a difference? Have you considered leaving your practice and doing something that you hope will be more fulfilling and less stressful?

Each year a number of lawyers decide that they are going to leave the practice of law altogether. They dream of doing what their hearts desire and going to bed happy every night. Some actually achieve this. Others find that what they thought their new career would bring is not the reality of the situation. As Doron Gold, case manager at the Ontario Lawyers' Assistance Program (OLAP), likes to point out in seminars on work/life balance, the problem may not be the law but what you are doing in the law.

Before you decide to leave your law practice behind, you might want to look at what your stressors are to see if changes in your practice and your time management approaches will make the law workable for you.

Dan Pinnington, director of Practice PRO at Lawyers' Professional Indemnity Company (LawPro), has written a large number of articles and has resources to help you with practice management. I particularly like his "The 2/3 Rule That Will Make You a Happy and Successful Lawyer." All your clients must meet at least 2/3 of the following requirements:

1. You are working on interesting and challenging problems;
2. You are working with people you enjoy; and
3. You are getting paid for your work.

In that same vein, my mentor told me that every Christmas I was to give myself the gift of divesting myself of three of my most difficult or non-paying clients.

The CBA Practice Link (www.cba.org/cba/practice-link/bwl/puttinghappiness.aspx) has a great article entitled — "Putting Happiness Back in Your Practice: Thirty Tips for Having a Happier, Better Practice." From that list I have chosen two tips to focus on in this article and then I will add a further tip that I think is vital to a successful life in the law.

Take good care of your health

Lawyers are highly-focused people who are perfectionists, controlling and used to delayed gratification. You see this in the need to get everything right, trouble delegating, and working long hours, sometimes even missing family events or social commitments. Some lawyers believe that the rules of nature do not apply to them as they skip meals or eat greasy, fast food, do not get



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adequate sleep and have as their "exercise program" trips to the coffee maker or the walk to the car at night after a long day.

There are simple rules my mother taught me to stay healthy physically that are relatively easy. Eat three balanced meals a day, especially breakfast, sleep at least eight hours a night and exercise strenuously, preferably cardio, for a half hour at least three days a week. Cut down on, or better still, cut out caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.

Work on your relationships with family and friends

As lawyers, we tend to isolate. Our lives are filled with stress. Having a support network makes it easier to feel fulfilled and connected to someone other than ourselves. If I were to ask you who the most important person or persons are in your life, you would probably say your family. In examining that belief, does the tire hit the road in our actions? Maybe not. To develop a strong relationship with your family, eat dinner or a meal with them four or five times a week. Attend the sporting events and school activities of your kids. Have a date with your partner at least once a week to stay in touch. With friends, call them often or spend time with them. It helps to share your feelings with people close to you and check in with them to see if you are on the same page in trying to have balance in your life.

Get help when you need it

Lawyers spend their days trying to solve problems, so we think that we cannot have them ourselves. If we do have an issue, we believe that others will think us weak and may take advantage of us. These myths are not true. Lawyers who are aware of their personal challenges

and who ask for help early can avoid negative consequences before they become a crisis. Those in a crisis can get help from an objective third party to work on solutions to avoid making things worse. If you have a health issue, call your doctor to deal with your problem. Better still, take the time to get an annual physical to check blood pressure, cholesterol, sugar counts and overall fitness. If your issue is of a mental wellness challenge, see a psychologist or a psychiatrist to deal with a mood disorder. Each province has a lawyers' assistance program that can refer you to appropriate resources for your issues. You could be connected to a peer support lawyer who has had the same issue that you are facing and will give you a sympathetic, non-judgmental ear and time. In Native American culture, asking for help is a sign of strength as you are using the community to help you be productive and well. I subscribe to this belief.

If, after all this self-examination and effort, you still decide that you must leave law, there are lots of resources available to you. Again, the CBA Practice Link (www.cba.org/cba/practicelink/career-builders_advancement/alternatives.aspx) has a great article titled — "Career Alternatives for Lawyers." Discover your passion and set up informational interviews with someone doing that kind of work so you can see if it is what you think it is. There are multitudes of job websites. Head hunters are keen to try to place lawyers with their transferable skills and experience. Your work and personal network will help you access the hidden job market. Career coaches can help direct your search.

If you need or want a change, talk to your family and friends. Get your support system working to give you the courage and determination to do what is right for you. ■

John Starzynski is the volunteer director, peer support and liaison at the Ontario Lawyers' Assistance Program (OLAP) and a director of the Legal Profession Assistance Conference (LPAC), the national umbrella organization for all lawyer assistance programs across Canada.

We want to hear from you!
Email us at: tlw@lexisnexis.ca

Director, Legal Services and Town Solicitor



The *Town of Aurora* is home to over 53,000 residents just north of Toronto, with a diverse mix of creative professionals, business leaders and community participants. Offering urban amenities and small town hospitality, Aurora is strategically located in the Greater Toronto Area with convenient access to both downtown Toronto and cottage country.

Reporting to the CAO, the Director of Legal Services and Town Solicitor provides overall management, leadership and provision of legal services, opinions and advice to Council/Committees, Senior Management Team, Town departmental staff and the Municipal Corporation as a whole in the areas of municipal law, land use planning law, real estate, corporate and commercial transactions, and administrative law.

- Drafting and/or participating in the review of by-laws, agreements, purchasing procedures, processes and documentation including RFP's, tenders and other corporate documents;
- Conducting legal research, assisting with claims and risk management review and advice;
- Retaining, monitoring and instructing external legal counsel;
- Participating as a member of the senior management team;
- Providing policy advice and recommendations on a diverse and broad range of issues, including legislation, provincial government initiatives, the role of local government and the general business of municipalities;
- Remaining current on new and proposed changes to provincial and federal statutes and regulations relating to the Town;
- Conducting or assisting with Court and administrative tribunal proceedings;
- Supervision, recruitment, development and evaluation of legal division staff;
- Attendance at Council/Committee meetings;
- Conducting real estate and property valuations for various development and real estate matters, determining and providing for cash-in-lieu calculations, establishing required processes and procedures and instituting and implementing same to provide for effective and efficient cash-in-lieu determination;
- Overall management of the division/section.

Since being called to the bar, you may have had exposure to municipal affairs as an inside counsel or outside counsel. Alternately, you may have excelled in a similarly complex healthcare, government or private sector organization. This is an opportunity to work with an extraordinary team in a role that offers enormous diversity and possibility. The position requires a law degree and good standing with the Law Society of Upper Canada.

To explore this opportunity further, please contact Margaret Vanwyck in our Toronto office at 416-366-1990 or margaret.vanwyck@odgersberndtson.ca. To be considered for this position, please submit your resume and related information online at <http://www.odgersberndtson.ca/en/careers/10034>.

Knowledge management reaps results

Implementing knowledge best practices can reap great benefits, according to a new survey from Practical Law Co. (PLC). Knowledge management helps firms identify, create and spread insights and experience to its workers. Law firms who used knowledge best practices saw cost reductions of between 20 to 25 per cent in matter delivery, according to the survey. Firms also saw results in other areas, with up to a 10 per cent reduction in the total cost of matter delivery through faster drafting and up to a 15 per cent reduction in the total cost of matter delivery through improved leverage.

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