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SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN • TIPS & TACTICS FOR NEW LAWYERS

Making the Right Job and Career Choices

Deciding to become a lawyer does not lock you into an inflexible career path. Your options for a rewarding professional life are plentiful. The key is to ensure that any job you take, or, more drastically, any career change you make, is compatible with your goals and those aspects of your life that are most important to you. It helps to carefully assess your goals, current situation and alternatives regularly throughout your career, including in the earliest years.

Financial considerations. What do you need to earn and save to meet your goals, in terms of both financial obligations and “extras” such as purchases, vacations and contributions? How much compensation do you need as disposable income versus in benefits such as insurance and retirement funds? Are you willing to forgo some immediate income for ownership in the firm or company?

Professional concerns. What do you want to learn and accomplish in your job and as a professional? How

important are the type of clients, cases and practice areas in which you’re engaged? What about the peers and mentors you work with? Does job security matter, or are you willing to take a risk? Is it important that you work with people who share your values, politics and other passions?

Personal factors. How much does life outside of work matter to you? Do you have hobbies, interests or responsibilities that require a certain amount of your time and attention? Are office location, work schedule or stress level of significant consideration to you? What about the overlap or separateness of work life and personal life?

Well-matched goals. Once you’ve assessed the various factors of importance to you, establish goals that incorporate those factors into your current and future career plans. Think about where you want to be five years from now, then devise annual, specific and measurable steps to get you there. Keep in mind that necessities as well as preferences can (and do) change from year to year.

Proper positioning. Look first at your current position. If it doesn’t satisfy you or promote your goals, could it be modified somehow (schedule, supervisor, practice area) to better meet your needs? If not, consider new opportunities. Fortunately, there are many different options in law practice. You may even decide to become a solo practitioner. And remember, the

skills and interests that brought you to the legal profession can open doors to other jobs and careers as well. **LP**

Checklist

Career Choices and Changes

- Decide what’s most important to you now—personally and professionally—and what will be important five years from now. Think through what matters to you on a day-to-day basis and reconcile that with your long-term goals.
- Identify specific aspects of your current job or career path that satisfy your needs. Identify those that make you unhappy or are missing from your work.
- Before assuming that there’s a better job or career out there for you, be certain that the one you have cannot be modified in some way to better meet your needs. You may be able to change your schedule, practice area, mentor or supervisor, level of responsibility and the like.
- When considering a new job or career, seek honest and objective feedback about the pros and cons in your areas of priority.
- Remember that no job or career decision need be permanent. There is almost certainly something out there that will bring you satisfaction.



Susan Saltonstall Duncan (sduncan@rainmakingoasis.com) is President of RainMaking Oasis, Inc., a marketing and management firm that provides planning, consulting and training tools to lawyers and law firms. She can be reached at (203) 318-0083.