



Four Reasons Why Legal Professionals Succeed (or Fail)

by Chere B. Estrin, Ph.D.

It is around this time that most of us decide it's time to change some aspect of our lives. We decide that:

- We're taking the train to Skinnyland – going on the final diet, the BIG one – the one that will mean that we are finally, finally svelte, lush, and size 4.
- We're going to find that “dream job” – the one where we don't have to bill time, everyone in the organization is like Mary Poppins, we have two weeks off each month, and a facial every Monday to soothe away the week's stress.
- We're going to find that “special someone” – you know, the one with godlike chiseled features and rippling forearms.

For those of you who are using traditional goal-setting methods, let me assure you that life doesn't work that way. Especially when it comes to the big things. After a few decades (ok, more than a few), of life on this planet, I've come to realize that it's the small decisions that put us on the path to success, a great career, a loving marriage, a healthy life.

No matter how you tackle it, there are basically two characteristics in the American psyche:

- Enthusiasm for the future and making things better, and
- Openness and willingness to change in order to achieve that end.

So often, we are so busy that we fail to take time to learn basic, successful life management principles that have been developed by highly successful people in our industry.

Many legal professionals are technical experts in what they do but fail at getting to the top of the field, attaining joyous job satisfaction or just plain having fun at what they do. They fail not because of a weakness in their character but because their professional life was not properly managed.

Once a career has emerged or grown to a certain level, management of your career must change or the career will run into trouble. For many legal professionals, this level is between 5-10 years of experience. Sometimes the critical point is higher or lower. However, when it occurs, the legal professional must evolve, morph, or otherwise change from a floater (someone who lets his/her career direct them) to a manager of your career through strategic thinking.

What do successful people have that others don't?

First — They invariably have a positive attitude toward their career and life in general. They are also they are committed to their effort, they are patient, and they are persistent. *Plus*, they constantly pursue additional training because they understand that knowledge is a primary key to success.

Second — Successful legal professionals have a Strategic Career Plan that clearly describes their concept, philosophy, direction and goals. Their position, tasks and responsibilities are defined. They know ahead of time what

the next move will look like. If they don't, they spend time investigating the answer.

Third — They have developed a Board of Directors (a group of advisors, not just one mentor) that supports them like a well-oiled machine. Furthermore, these professionals view their colleagues as one of their most valuable resources. Fourth, and lastly, successful legal professionals have developed strong support systems. These may be financial or non-financial, emotional, educational or tangible or intangible. Well structured, they take care of red flags, know how to play office politics, and take timely action as changes occur.

Fourth — A little advance planning can go a long way toward making your life run smoothly, alleviating last-minute problems and averting potential disasters. No matter what unforeseen problems or difficulties arise on the road to success, stay cool, calm and professional. Even if you cannot solve the problem, your colleagues, friends and family will be impressed with your composure and, if you remain confident and proceed with your program, mind-over-matter should contribute to the success of your plan.

In sum, the four keys to successful careers by professionals are:

- 1) Positive, Committed, Patient, and Persistent work habits and traits
- 2) Making Sure to Have a Strategic Career Plan in place
- 3) Using a Organized Board of Directors to encourage best efforts
- 4) Relying on a Strong Support System

With hard work, thorough research, consistent testing, appropriate innovation and enthusiasm, you should enjoy equal rewards. These simple but highly effective strategies can help you take advantage of the marketing potential of your plan and turn your program into a roaring success.

Start fresh. Set up a new life file. There will be a new set of logistics to consider and work your way through. Start at the beginning and begin to fill in the detail. There is magic in the detail, the magic of memorable careers.

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