

5 KEY STEPS TO TAKE CHARGE! OF YOUR CAREER

Being a lawyer can be frustrating. Expectations and demands are often overwhelming. It's easy to get caught up in the details of day-to-day work life and forget the big picture. If you want something more from your legal career, you're not alone. But most of us have no idea what to do. If that's you, here are five steps you can take today:

Step 1 - Be Rigorously Honest. It's so easy to deceive ourselves. We've spent tens of thousands of dollars and years of our lives being trained to do exactly what we do. So, why in the world would we ever admit we don't like it? And, if we do admit we don't like it, then what? Lawyers are some of the brightest people on the planet, but when it comes to our careers, we can be really stupid. We'll negotiate like a pit bull for our clients, but we settle for abject misery in our work lives. The first step to take charge of your career is to be honest with yourself. After all, if you can't be honest with yourself, who can you be honest with? Here's a simple question for you. Do you love what you do?

Step 2 - Challenge Your Beliefs. We've been studied! According to surveys, successful law students are the most cynical graduate students around. What do cynical law students grow up to be? Cynical lawyers. Being cynical may be a wonderful tool for the practice of law, but it's a horrible way to live life. Trust me. I know. When I graduated from law school, I never thought I could practice tax law. (I didn't think I had the smarts.) When I worked at a big law firm, I didn't think I could leave. (I didn't think I had the chutzpah.) I never thought I'd love the practice of law. (I didn't think it was possible.) I've accomplished all these things and more. When I challenge my limiting beliefs, doors open. New worlds unfold.

Step 3 – Think Big. The size of your imagination designs the size of your life. How big are the questions you ask yourself? Do you ask: "How can I grind more hours away at the firm?" Or, do you ask: "How can I create a career that is fun, energizing, meaningful, rewarding and inspiring?" Wherever you focus is where you'll direct your time and attention. Asking big questions reconnects you to what's important in your life moving you towards your bigger game.

Step 4 – Be Practical. Taking charge of your career requires practicality. You don't have to be like Cortez who - legend has it - burned his boats to commit his men to victory. Take small steps. Develop a strategy and stick to it. You might even discover you can tweak things at your current job and be happy. Instead of burning bridges (yes, I know I'm mixing metaphors), you can build them. Perhaps your current job is a "bridge" helping you transition to something you'll truly enjoy.

Step 5 – Find Allies. Finding allies is often the most difficult (yet most critical) step. As lawyers, we isolate. We suffer in our careers, in solitude. We tell ourselves our suffering is noble. What hogwash! Life is short. Find mentors who have done what you want to do. Don't wait a decade to create your perfect career. Hire a coach to help you accelerate your learning curve. Remember, taking charge of your career is an art and a science.



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