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MANAGEMENT

Navigating Detours on the Road to Success

by Kathleen Brady

March 2005

The road to success is paved with detours, speed bumps and potholes. The Bureau of Labor Statistics tell us that the average American will work for 10 *employers*, keeping each *job* 3.6 years, and change *careers* three times before retiring. Sometimes the changes will be voluntary; sometimes the changes will be instigated by outside forces. Either way, change is inevitable. Therefore, if you want to get the most out of your career, minimize the impact of the detours, speed bumps and potholes you encounter, and maximize your chances for success, you must be prepared.

Undoubtedly, you have already experienced some form of a career transition. Remember, a transition does not only mean a job change. Morphing from a junior associate to a mid-level associate, or associate to partner is a transition; so is switching practice groups or offices; or going from a fulltime to a part time schedule. Then there are the transitions in other areas of life that impact your career path. Perhaps you became a new spouse or parent; or lost a spouse or parent; or experienced an unexpected illness, or have been affected by changes in the economy. How have you managed these changes? Hopefully you are not one of those people who experience transitions as something that happens TO them rather than as something that can be planned for and controlled. If you are, it is time to take action.

If you are like most people, you spend more time planning your vacations than you do planning your career. Consider the vacation planning process. Most of us choose a destination based on specific criteria about how we enjoy spending our time. Why not use the same mindset as a first step towards mapping out a career strategy? Think about what you like to do and where the best place to do it might be. Invest time and effort to assess your skills and knowledges as well as your wants and needs. Then determine where you can best utilize those talents to soar to success.

Think about success for a minute. What does it look like? Odds are, every person reading this has a different answer yet there are four common elements in every vision of success. They are:

1. being content about your life,
2. achieving measurable accomplishments that compare favorably to others with similar goals;
3. believing that you have a positive impact on people you care about most;
4. leaving a legacy in order to help others experience future success.

Each element contributes to the way you experience success **right now**. Success is NOT a future event or something to aspire towards. Think of it as a current state of being; the ability to pay full and

undivided attention to what matters most in your life at any given moment.

Of course, the difficult part is figuring out what matters most.

That's where self-assessment comes in. Most lawyers fail to engage in the self-assessment process. They arrive at career/life decisions not on the basis of any meaningful thought process, but rather on familial obligations or societal expectations. They rely on external definitions of success instead of following their own path, with inevitably leads to unhappiness. Don't do it! Decide for yourself how you want to use your skills and talents and how you want to invest your "human capital" to achieve the desired return on your investment. Only then can you be truly successful.

Success is a subjective perception based on what YOU, as an individual, values. Values are those intangible principles and standards that bring meaning to your work and motivate your involvement and commitment. You need to ask yourself what your values are and which hold the most meaning and importance to you. People tend to feel most comfortable when surrounded by others who hold similar values and in situations where their values are appreciated. These factors are crucial to your job satisfaction.

Attitude drives behavior and a positive attitude is critical to success. This is especially true when you experience career setbacks—and we all do! They are traumatic because they imply "failure." But consider the following failures:

- Babe Ruth struck out 1330 times in route to the Hall of Fame.
- Elvis Presley was banish from the Grand Ole Opry after only one performance and told, "You ain't going nowhere son."
- Oprah Winfrey was fired from her job as a TV reporter and advised, "You're not fit for TV."
- Walt Disney's first cartoon production company went bankrupt
- John Grisham's first novel, *A Time to Kill*, was rejected by 15 agents and a dozen publishing houses
- Edgar Allan Poe was expelled from West Point
- Abraham Lincoln lost eight elections, failed at two businesses and had a nervous breakdown before becoming our 16th President.

Nothing succeeds like failure. Learning opportunities, which are necessary for growth and development, sometimes come in the form of what would traditionally be defined as "failure." The world is filled with examples of people who used failure as a springboard to success. While I am not suggesting you go out of your way to fail to achieve your career goals, I am encouraging you to accept the fact that failures are going to happen. Readjust the prism through which you view such failures and you can use them to your advantage.

Managing your career development is an on-going process that includes planning and strategizing based on information about yourself and the world of work, the match between them and the actions you take. You must make a lifelong commitment to actively manage your career/life and develop strategies to adapt to the inevitable transitions you are destined to encounter.

Career planning is like solving a business problem. Every successful business venture begins with a comprehensive business plan, updated annually, outlining goals and objectives. You should have one too.

Think about the direction you'd like your life to take. First, list the ten to twelve most important things you want to accomplish during your lifetime. Date your list. These are your **LIFETIME GOALS**. From that list, select the four or five things you want to accomplish in the next 5 years to create your **FIVE YEAR PLAN**. Then, review your 5-year plan and choose the two or three things you want to accomplish during the coming year. These are your **ANNUAL GOALS**. For each **ANNUAL GOAL** listed, write down the answer to the following questions.

1. **WHAT** is the goal?
2. **WHY** do I want to achieve this goal?
3. **WHEN** will I achieve this goal?
4. **HOW** will I achieve this goal? (Or: *What 3 things do I need to DO?*)
5. **WHO** can help me achieve this goal?

Repeat this process once a year, referring back to your **LIFETIME GOALS** and **5-YEAR PLAN**. Revise each list as circumstances warrant. You will be amazed at what you can accomplish when you are clear about what you want and have an action plan in place to guide you.

Finding the courage to forge your own path and construct a personal definition of success in the face of the external obligations and pressures isn't easy. In fact, it is downright scary. Do it anyway. I promise, once you get started you will find the process is more affirming than it is scary. Take a deep breath and take the first step. The rewards will be monumental.

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