

Alternative Career Paths for Lawyers

Contributed by Norton Gappy

There are those who knew they wanted to go to law school by the time they hit the third grade. There are those who went to law school to pursue careers in politics. And then there are those who went to law school by default, knowing they wanted to continue their education but not certain what avenue to take. Undoubtedly, a Juris Doctorate degree is invaluable. It opens doors that many of did not even know existed.

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The legal profession is losing talent to various other industries. According to NALP Bulletin, in 2002, more than 10% of law school graduates pursued alternative careers outside the practice of law. In 2006, the rate of attrition rose to nearly 20% of associate attorneys leaving the practice. The statistics are not intended to paint an ugly picture, but to remind us that the opportunities are infinite with a Juris Doctorate.

Lawyers are dissatisfied with the practice due to the high stress, poor quality of life, and mediocre pay. Many are seeking more flexible hours and less adversarial exchanges. And let us not forget the most common complaint! the dreaded billable hours requirement! The prospect of combining a legal background with a business career is promising to many attorneys with an entrepreneurial spirit. Some common alternative career options for attorneys are:

- Banking and Financial Service Companies
- Accounting/CPA Firms
- Real Estate Development Companies
- Management Consulting Firms
- Legal Recruiting (headhunting)
- Business Opportunities (retail and service operations including franchises)
- Teaching/Education

A legal education, polished by practice in the field, is often a valuable and transferable skill-set considered to be an asset to the business sectors. The transition from lawyer to banker, financier, and businessman/woman has been seamless for many attorneys. The legal education and the practice itself help lawyers refine their analytical thinking skills, research and writing skills, problem solving, negotiation skills, and general business knowledge. A law degree helped former CEO of AOL Time Warner, Attorney Gerald Levin, the founder of California Pizza kitchen, Attorney Jack Allen, and the founder of Zagat (restaurant guides) make the transition from lawyer to entrepreneur.

(Information was taken from NALP Bulletin, April 2002, reprinted 2006)

How to make career plans whether you are a student or an attorney?Â

Some people know immediately that the practice of law is not for them, while some attorneys decide to switch careers after a few year of practice. How do you know whether a career path outside the practice of law right for you? Thatâ€™s a question only you can answer. You can begin with a self-assessment of your career objectives, creating a list of realistic goals, and seizing the right opportunity when it presents itself. Once you decide to pursue a non-legal career, you will probably need to consider and address the following:

- Edit your resume to focus on strengths such as marketing and management rather than legal tasks.
- Use networking skills and utilize contacts and relationships you have developed over the years to search for non-law related jobs and business opportunities.
- Talk to a career counselor / job placement advisor for additional advice.
- Contact a recruiter.
- Jump in and do it!

The opportunities are endless for lawyers.Â

Online Job Search Sites:

www.careerbuilder.com

www.monster.com

www.attorneyjobs.com

Books to Read:

What Can You Do With A Law Degree? A Lawyerâ€™s Guide to Career Alternatives Inside, Outside, & Around the Law, by Deborah Arron.Â

Forums:

LegalNut™s Attorney Forums