

BUSINESS & CAREERS

Connecting pragmatism with passions

As a recruiter, one of the common themes we face is how to help associates regain their passion within the law practice. Many associates are in a career that emerged as a result of academic excellence in undergrad and continuing through law school, resulting in a prestigious start with a top tier firm.

Once associates are immersed in practice, however, they often feel challenged assessing whether their success to date is aligned with their longer-term career aspirations.

Here are a few key practices we've observed in lawyers who have mindfully transitioned from early success to long-term alignment between their practice and interests.

Pro-actively educate yourself

Junior associates often struggle to articulate their goals early in their careers, as they are still trying to assess what they really want out of their practice.

A select (and perhaps fortunate) few are able to secure positions out of law school practising exactly what they had hoped for in a suitable environment. For many others, the path is more circuitous: they started out law school with aspirations of practising A, after summering discover interests in practice B, wind up taking an offer practising C, creating angst as to whether their career will ultimately be fulfilling.

A key practice in determining what you want in your career is to

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THE HEADHUNTER



DAVID NAMKUNG



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Never Standing Still.



BUSINESS & CAREERS

Aligning what you do to what you want

Passion

Continued From Page 23

connect with mentors whose careers you admire. While many associates may do this on a spontaneous basis, our experience is the truly successful go out of their way to proactively seek these individuals. Whether talking to a partner at their firm, a judge, a mentor through CBA, in-house counsel or even a recruiter, by proactively connecting with those who enjoy inspiring practices, these young lawyers are better able to envision what they plan to strive toward.

Once you have identified individuals to approach for career insight, the key is to ask some critical questions to pinpoint elements of their practice you wish to emulate: what do/don't they like about their daily practice? What are the challenges about their practice area or particular firm? As you engage in conversations with more and more people, you eventually educate yourself on the nuances of various practices by asking the right questions, enabling

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David Namkung,
The Counsel Network

you to understand what your most suitable options may be and how best to plan for next steps.

Be honest

Armed with this knowledge, the key is to be as honest as possible with yourself in assessing what path you most want to pursue. Do you want to be a top litigator or solicitor in the market? Are you willing to pursue their lifestyle or would you rather have more balance? How does this desire rank against other priorities?

One of our best clients often comments that, while some of his friends like to golf on the weekend, he truly enjoys learning

about the business of running his firm (one of the top litigation boutiques in the market), and takes great pleasure in trying to better understand the legal principles and ideas shaping the court. Clearly, this is someone who has found an alignment between his practice and passion. Understanding his motivations and how he approaches his practice would be insightful to anyone who seeks to mirror his highly successful career.

Goal-setting can be challenging and time-intensive as it involves, among other things, honestly evaluating values, interests, strengths and weaknesses,

and ascertaining which career paths are most suitable.

Align goals with interests

No matter the goal, a key practice is to assess whether your current practice environment will give you a reasonable prospect of achieving your goals in the medium term.

Can you gain access to the kind of work you want? Can you get mentorship suitable for your career development? Will you be empowered to build your own brand (if that is important to you)? These are all helpful questions to ask when assessing whether your current environment is aligned to your goals.

If your current practice does not point you toward your goals, it is worth considering whether you can tweak or modify your existing surroundings (seek work from other groups, pro-bono matters, etc.) to find a suitable solution or at least gain relevant experience in the interim. Otherwise, external practice alternatives may be optimal.

Execute

Once you have a sense of how you want to see your career unfold, take active steps toward it. For example, if you are passionate about becoming a rain-maker, while skill development as a lawyer remains critical in the formative years in practice, the need to establish business contacts and a market presence happens sooner than most lawyers appreciate, so build a plan around this and act on it. Similarly, if your aspiration is to be a leading

figure in a specific practice area, then seize opportunities to distinguish your expertise. For example, two promising young associates (former clerks at the B.C. Court of Appeal) recently created the B.C. Civil Appeals Netletter, which is now circulated to hundreds of litigators across the country.

Actively review

Once you have established a game plan, it is equally important to actively and consistently review how you are progressing against your previously stated goals. Reviews provide accountability for making tangible strides towards your goals and provide insight on where you may wish to redirect your development—your goals may change, or new opportunities may present.

In the end, the key is to take control of ensuring your career goals are being aligned with your passions. It is never too early (or too late) to set goals and to take steps toward them. Associates who don't actively set out and pursue their goals run the risk of allowing others to set their plans for them, which may limit their chances of finding long term career satisfaction. ■

David Namkung is a recruitment consultant with The Counsel Network in Vancouver and vice-president of fundraising for the Federation of Asian Canadian Lawyers (B.C. Chapter).

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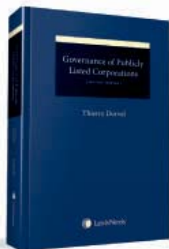
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Purdy Crawford
Counsel, Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP and
Director of several public corporations

From the foreword

Good corporate governance is more critical now than ever before, especially in the wake of recent large-scale corporate failures and massive government bailouts. In this second edition, Norton Rose Canada corporate law partner Thierry Dorval describes the issues that lie at the crux of corporate governance. He discusses the various legal challenges facing corporate directors today, and examines governance practices that can assist in meeting those challenges.

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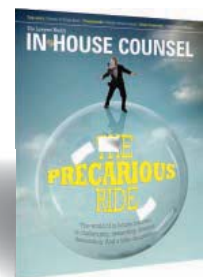
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