

Celebrating the Seasons of Our Life: A Lawyer's Summer

Part 2 of a 4 part series on the seasons of our lives as lawyers
by Susan Ann Koenig

There is a measure of relief for the lawyer who finds employment, starts to get the hang of the every day practice, and settles in to a routine of heading to the office. When the spring of our career is behind us, our roots have grown down more deeply.

We feel a bit more stable. Our relationships broaden as we have more people we can turn to with questions, and are a somewhat less afraid to ask them. We feel a little less like we are going to get ill when we head into the courtroom or a critical negotiation. Our skills are strengthened and we see that we can serve in the role of lawyer with more ability than ever.

At this point in our professional lives, not everything is being done for the very first time, and we begin to develop a confidence that we might just make it in this profession. As we move from the spring to the summer of our careers, we can be grateful to have found a place in law and also curious about

what our future career path will look like. And while certain challenges subside, a new crop of them emerges.

Here are some questions we can ask ourselves during this season of our lives as lawyers.

What Do I Want to Create?

"No one ever told me that there was any other way besides taking the job with a good firm and being on the partnership track," said the mother of three. "It was like you were letting people down if you didn't do what was expected with the education and opportunities you where given."

The challenge for the lawyer who is past the novice stage, but still relatively early in the practice, is to gain greater clarity on the life they want to create. We might ask:

- Where do I see my career as I look to the years ahead?
- What type of lifestyle do I want?
- What type of law would I like to do more of? Less of?
- What contributions do I see I can make to my profession, my family, my community?

The more we take the time to ask these questions, the clearer the vision for our future becomes. Our focus increases when we have a better picture of what we want. Setting goals gets easier because we know the direction in which we are headed.

If you feel very unsure about your future, take some time out for reflection. Unplug and spend some time in nature or just take a walk to ponder the questions. Journal. Talk to people who listen well. Consider hiring a coach. Most of all, be curious.

Susan Ann Koenig



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Allow yourself the time to write a vision for the life you want to create. Where would you be living? What sort of office (if any) would you be working in? What type of people would be around you? Use your imagination to describe the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings of the life as a lawyer you would love to have. This exercise can help you both explore possibilities and spot future opportunities when they arise. Step out of your analytical attorney mind and let yourself imagine.

What am I Willing to Do to Create the Life I Want?

During this stage of our life, we may know what we want to create but be unsure just how to get there. Having a plan and identifying the actions you are willing to take are essential. To help you get there, keep asking questions like these:

- Am I doing work that is preparing me for where I want to go?
- Have I identified specific short term goals which will move me closer to where I want to be?
- What skills do I need to improve in order to get to there? How can I develop them?
- What obstacles will I face on this journey?
- Am I developing habits which will serve me well into my future?
- What scares me most about taking the necessary action?

Our development as lawyers begins to shift from learning the basics to gaining increasing levels of mastery. We might find this in our ability to be a rainmaker, a litigator, or a leader within the firm. In short, it is a time of tremendous growth.

When you see the skills you need, set upon a plan for developing them. Reading, taking classes, being mentored, and above all practicing the skills you want to master should all be a part of your plan. As discomfort or fear arise, simply recognize these as signs that learning is occurring.

Whether you want to reduce your work hours, get elected to the House of Delegates, or hang out your own shingle, having a plan of action will move you in the direction of the life you see you long to live.

Who is in My Circle of Support?

Knowing where you want to go and how you plan to get there is fundamental. If getting there sounds really big to you--which undoubtedly it does--remember you don't have to do it alone.

No one ever gets to their destination in life without the support of others. The challenge for attorneys is that many of us are not accustomed to letting others help us. We are used to being the ones that others come to with their problems, fears,

and questions. We are used to being the smart ones with the answers.

Being willing to be vulnerable and asking others for their support will be necessary if you want to build the career and life that is authentic for you. The sooner you learn the skill of letting in support, the sooner life will get easier.

Here are some ways you might find support during this time of your life:

- If you have not already found a mentor, now is the time.
- Enlist the support of others in your office for shifting your workload to doing more of what you love or do best.
- Remember that your family members are more likely to help if you stop doing everything for them and ask for what you need.
- Consider whether it is time to expand your support at work, either through improved delegation or expanding your staff.
- Ask yourself whether it is time to enlist in the help of a professional in any area of your life where an expert would make your life easier.
- Identify the people who are your cheerleaders, and keep sharing your vision with them.

Support is essential at every stage of our lives, and this one is no exception. Your mind will be tempted to say "They are too busy. Only I can do it right. They'll think I'm weak." You let those thoughts stop you, or you can begin to practice a vital skill for creating the life you want.

Seeking the Ever-Elusive Balance

Our legal career is never the sole focus of our lives as lawyers. We have our health, our families, our communities, and other passions unique to us. As our reputation grows, we get invited to be more involved in everything from our synagogue to the soccer field.

We are likely to continue to take on more responsibilities during this season of our life, rarely pausing to ask whether anything should come off of our plate. Now is a good time to ask:

- How much time am I willing to give to my work each week?
- How important is it to me to earn certain levels of income?
- Is there something I need to say "no" to?
- What used to give me tremendous joy which I no longer take time for?

The temptation during this time is to think that we can or we must "do it all." Remembering that there are seasons of our life, we can make the sometimes difficult decision to say,

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"This is not the season for this," and to focus on what is most important right now.

Our capacity to be flexible and resilient impacts the quality of our lives. Despite our plans, events will occur which we never envisioned. The shake-up at the office, the health crisis, the loss of a big client, a tornado. No matter what unexpected

challenge arises, the more clear you are about where you are headed, the easier it will be to find the path back to it, and to step onto it at any time.

The summer is a season of growth but also a season of fun. Whatever you do, be sure to take some time out to enjoy a bit of rest and relaxation while the sun is shining. ☀



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