

# Celebrating the Seasons of Our Life: A Lawyer's Autumn

Part 3 of a 4 part series on the seasons of our lives as lawyers  
by Susan Ann Koenig

I have always loved this time of year. I enjoy sweet memories of golden leaves glistening on giant trees on the way to school on the edge of Omaha's Little Italy, proud back to school shopping with my summer earnings, and the security of returning to a place where I felt I could be successful. To this day the fall gives me a burst of enthusiasm for new good things to come.

Of all of the seasons of a lawyer's life, it is autumn in which I am most immersed. It is a therefore the one which I may be least capable of examining with clarity. When we are too close to a subject, we may not see it clearly. When we are in the middle of anything, we sometimes lose perspective. Who knows this better than lawyers?

Such it is when we are in the midst of living our lives. We are blinded from the full view when we are buried in the small bits of daily living. When we assemble hundreds of small facts in a case, we can forget the compelling story. When we feel burdened by the chores of everyday living, we can lose our gratitude. Because I find myself in the autumn of my legal

career, my observations must be considered suspect.

Nevertheless, I ask myself the questions I find useful in every season:

What is most important for me to focus on at this time?

What can I celebrate?

What is it time to let go of?

What have I already learned, and what is here for me to learn now?

What is the greatest contribution I can make to my world?

In the autumn of our lives as lawyers, we may notice ourselves being more grounded.

Our roots have grown deeper in relationships and community. Even if we move to a new firm or begin a new relationship, we do so with a deeper understanding of who we are. Unlike the fear we had when we started that first job out of law school, during this season we experience more clarity about our choices.

The beauty of this clarity is that it can inform us of the direction in which we are called to go in our lives. The challenge of this clarity is that it can inform us of the direction we are called to go in our lives. In the autumn, it becomes more difficult to deny who we are and to live a life that is not in integrity with that knowing.

As lawyers know, asking powerful questions helps us to see.

## What is most important for me to focus on now?

As with all transitions, the autumn of our career demands the release of what has been.

### Susan Ann Koenig



Susan Ann Koenig, JD, is an executive coach and speaker who inspires and empowers successful people to make their greatest contribution. She is the author of *Divorce in Nebraska* and co-author of *Success Simplified---Simple Solutions, Measurable Results* with Stephen R. Covey. Susan is of counsel with Koenig Dunne Divorce Law in Omaha where she contributes to the blog,

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No longer do we have the luxury of letting those in leadership make the tough decisions; we are now the decision makers. No longer can we call ourselves students; we have become the role models. We can no longer fool ourselves that our career path is temporary; we must face the truth of the path we are on.

Ask yourself whether you are focusing on what is most important, or whether you have lost sight of what you truly value. Consider whether it is time for you to invest more in developing others on your legal team rather than focusing solely on your individual achievement. Perhaps this is a time for a significant change in direction. Are you willing to be courageous and just take a look?

As you answer these questions, you might experience a sense of peace knowing that you are on the path that is right for you. Or, you might face an honest truth that your attention has not been in the places that matter most to you. Either way, getting clear about what is important during this season of your life will make it easier to focus and take action in the direction that is right for you.

### **What is my greatest contribution?**

By the time we are in this season of our life as professionals, we can begin to contribute in different ways. With all of our experience, we have more to give.

Ask yourself whether it is time for you to step into leadership. Is it time for you to consider a succession plan, even if you plan to be the lawyer who works until their dying day? What will your legacy as a lawyer be?

Has your fear of failure stopped you from moving to the next level in some way? Perhaps there is an initiative that calls out for you to be a part of, a new system you see should be implemented, or practice area for you to expand. Is it time to take up that secret pastime you always loved but never made time for?

Without looking at this question, we can fall into an uncomfortable comfort. We can continue to do that which we do easily and well. We can avoid the discomfort of new learning, risk, and failure. And we can miss out on the opportunity to make our greatest contribution. It's up to you.

### **What is it time for you to release?**

Autumn is the beginning of endings. One by one the leaves begin falling. Nature has this wisdom innately, yet we humans often want to fight against this inevitable unfolding of our universe.

Examine whether now is the time for you to let go of something that you have been holding on to. For me, most of what falls into this category is deeply tied to my ego---status, a title, an office, or an acknowledgment I seek. What I know is that refusing to surrender these things only gets in the way of my doing what I am called to do next.

Are you holding onto beliefs that no longer serve you? Would it be useful to reconsider your assumptions about the best way to spend your time? Are there relationships that once served you well but do not any longer? Is there a role that you have been playing which you will allow your ego to step away from?

One of the biggest complaints lawyers make is about not having enough time. A contributor to this is that we keep taking on more and more as the years go by, too seldom pausing to consider what we might let go of in order to make room for the "most important" in our lives. This can be especially true of activities we have done well for many years. Just because we "always have" doesn't mean we "always should" spend our precious time in the same way we did ten years ago.

Most importantly: Is it time to let go of old beliefs about who you are and why you are here? Those glistening leaves that die a silent death as they float gently to their end teach me, remind me. In the autumn of my life it is time to surrender old beliefs that no longer serve me well. If I hold on to them, I am assured they will get in the way of new growth which is possible so long as I am still alive.

### **Am I making time for reflection?**

For over twenty years I have joined a group of friends to celebrate the start of fall. My pal, Gretchen, hosts us at her lake home. We take long walks, appreciate the beauty, sit around the fire. It is a precious ritual which provides the time and space for reflection about our relationships, our work, and who we are.

It can be difficult to raise our heads above the fray and truly observe our lives. We need support. The support could be as big as a week alone hiking in the Rockies or as small as a pen and journal at our bedside to record our thoughts of the day.

If you get the thought, "I don't have time to think about my life!" then I invite you to merely observe that you hold this belief, and then ask yourself again the questions posed here.

### **What can I celebrate?**


During this season of our career, we have so much to celebrate! We have made it through the early, humbling days of learning the fundamentals of being a good lawyer. We have formed meaningful relationships with clients, colleagues, and co-workers. We even have some areas where we have achieved mastery.

When we fail to take time to celebrate our successes, we miss out on enjoying the life we have worked so hard to create. Instead, we simply trudge on to the next task on the never-ending to do list.

When was the last time you stopped to experience pride in the number of clients you have served well over the years? Have you given yourself a pat on the back for surviving during throughout a lengthy recession? Can you acknowledge yourself

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for having developed an excellent reputation within the legal community? Consider a celebration for landmark anniversaries such as your admission to the bar, your starting or joining your firm, or your becoming partner.

Autumn is the time to reap your harvest. The seeds you planted when you became a lawyer have gone from sprouts to full maturity as a result of your dedicated nurturing and hard work. This is truly a season to celebrate and be grateful. 



**Powerful Witness Preparation**  
*featuring Daniel I. Small*

**Thursday, December 20, 2012 • 8:45 am - 4:15 pm**

**Embassy Suites - La Vista • 12520 Westport Parkway, La Vista, NE 68128-2198**

**\*Nebraska MCLE Activity #72675. 6 CLE hours including 1 hour ethics.**

**Agenda  
8:45 am**

- I. Need
  - a. Environment
  - b. This is Not a Conversation
- II. The Challenge
  - a. Three Mistakes Witnesses Make
  - b. Seven Mistakes Lawyers Make
- III. The Process
  - a. Preparation – Key Steps
  - b. Preparation Checklist
  - c. Key Goals

**10:15 am Break**

**10:30 am**

- IV. The Rules
  - a. Basic Principles
  - b. Framing the Message
  - c. The 10 Rules
  - d. Making an Impact

**12:00 pm Lunch (included with your registration)**

**1:00 pm**

- V. Ethical Challenges: Preparation Does Not Mean Coaching!

**2:00 pm**

- VI. Adapting to the Situation

- a. Interview v. Testimony
- b. Deposition v. Trial
- c. Direct v. Cross

**2:30 pm Break**

**2:45 pm**

- VII. Special Witness
  - a. Expert Witness
  - b. Physician Witness
  - c. Former Employee Witness
  - d. Criminal Defendant Witness

VIII. Core Themes/Home Bases

**4:15 pm Adjourn**

**LIVE SEMINAR REGISTRATION FORM: Powerful Witness Preparation - December 20, 2012**

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