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☞ Recently, I was asked if I was going to fire an employee who made a mistake that cost the company \$600,000. No, I replied, I just spent \$600,000 training him. Why would I want somebody to hire his experience? ☞ —Thomas John Watson Sr., first CEO of IBM

## LEGAL RECRUITING

# Thinking of a big change? Think carefully

Changing your career path a big step that starts with some basic questions

### GRANT CAMERON

Like any professionals, lawyers can find themselves at a crossroads in their careers. But after years of schooling, articling and perhaps toiling for a firm, it isn't easy making the decision to pull the plug to pursue a brand new line of work.

Where do you start? What are the alternative career choices? How do you find a good fit?

The first step, according to career coaching experts, is to figure out exactly what the problem is with the present job, then seek advice from a certified professional business coach or career counsellor who can help you ask the right questions and dig deep for the answers.

Lawyers who are thinking about making the move into a new career, they say, should analyze their transferable skills, evaluate the market, figure out if they want to be an entrepreneur or work for a company, then map out a strategy to get into that dream job.

Ian Solomon, a lawyer and certified professional coach in Toronto who helps people cope with changes around career transitions, says it's important for lawyers to seek help from a consultant or career coach because an outsider can often provide a better perspective.

If a lawyer decides he or she wants to pursue another career, the coach can help the candidate understand what they're really up against by having the individual figure out what transferable skills they have and how they can be incorporated into a new career path, he says.

"We focus on what their interests are and any secret passions that they might have. We spend quite a bit of time mining that area."

Solomon says it's not as easy as it sounds.

For example, he's found that, generally speaking, lawyers have a tough time becoming entrepreneurs because they're often fearful of failure.

If an entrepreneur hits a speed bump, they will "motor on" and if they fail they'll pick themselves up, dust themselves off and carry on, he explains.

"I wouldn't say that is a trait that most lawyers have. Lawyers, by and large, are risk-averse because they're trained to weigh the downside of any move they might make. In their everyday practice, they're retained to

look at where their clients might be exposed."

Gary Mitchell, principal business development coach at On Trac Coach in Vancouver, advises lawyers to think long and hard before making a career move.

"I caution them to really find out what the reasons are for leaving after making such a huge investment in their education and then experience," he says. "Before they even go down the road of jumping, I caution them to really identify what it is they are struggling with."

Mitchell, author of *Raindance: The Business Development Guidebook for Lawyers*, says in some instances the problems lawyers have with their present job can be overcome or negotiated. "I'd identify what the hurdles and challenges are that they're having difficulty with and, in this way, a career coach can help."

Mitchell has worked with a number of clients who were struggling at their jobs and didn't realize that was just the norm. "They thought they were isolated. They thought it was a unique situation, but found it was actually kind of the norm. It's a stressful career and there are many challenges, but before you jump ship, just know that the grass is not always greener on the other side of the stream."

So how does a lawyer know when it's time to move on?

Mitchell Osak, founder and managing director of Quanta Consulting Inc., a Toronto-based management consultancy firm, says it's often a feeling that comes on gradually. "I think people get up sometimes in the morning and they start disliking what they do and then they start to hate what they do and they dread going to work."

Osak says lawyers can get discouraged in their jobs because their expectations are not being met. "What makes it special with lawyers, accountants and dentists is that they're typically highly motivated, highly intelligent, and, like a lot of things in life, it becomes a mundane job and it may not have been what many of them dreamed about when they went into law school."

Lawyers may end up doing basic transactions and paperwork instead of court work or making deals and "it's lost its lustre and it's no longer fun," he says.

As for careers, Osak says lawyers often move into careers in business because they usually deal with businesspeople in their



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work and very often become envious of their jobs.

"They look and say: 'Why am I not the guy or gal doing the deal and making the transactions instead of the one reading thousands of pages of contracts?'"

It's only natural for lawyers to get interested in the business of the clients they serve and develop a network in that line of work, he says.

"Eventually, good lawyers pick up a lot of the skills that their clients possess. For some of them, it's a natural evolution."

Mitchell believes lawyers are best suited to any job that is analytical in nature, and that includes writing or publishing work. "I think they make exquisite editors because of their attention to detail."

He's seen many lawyers make a successful transition to companies they were serving.

"In one instance, the lawyer was with a firm and they were the team lead on the client, and the company actually brought the lawyer in to run the company because the lawyer did such a great job in getting to know the business. It wasn't bad for the law firm either because the law firm continued serving the client."

For Solomon, meanwhile, it's only natural for lawyers to go to work for firms that had as clients.

"As a lawyer, they might have been involved in all aspects of the client's business. The level of trust is built up and they're recruited by the clients."

Solomon also believes politics

is a good career choice for lawyers seeking a new challenge because they're trained to consider issues and are used to the legislative process.

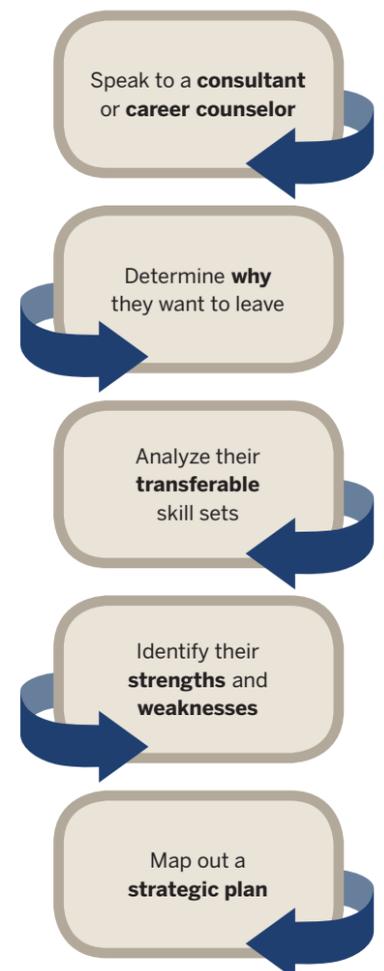
"They are able to weigh what's relevant and what's not. Weighing the relevant issues in a particular problem makes them suited for politics."

### We want to hear from you!

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## Steps

Before changing careers, lawyers are advised to:



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