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# How Do You Decide On A Nonlegal Career?

by Gary A. Munneke  
and Frances Utlej

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**Can a young lawyer  
be happy as a  
television star?  
As a major league  
baseball manager?  
As a corporation  
president?**

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What happens after a young lawyer is graduated from law school, passes the bar, accepts an offer from a successful law firm, then one day peers out from behind a huge stack of briefs and asks: "Is this all there is?"

Recent surveys have indicated that many young lawyers are dissatisfied with the direction that their careers have taken. There are always other options, and an increasingly attractive choice for many young lawyers is the nonlegal career.

What is a nonlegal career? Can a lawyer find happiness outside the practice of law? How does a lawyer find a nonlegal position?

Many lawyers are reluctant to depart from traditional practice, assuming that moving into a nonlegal career is opting for a second-rate choice. These feelings have all too often been magnified by family and friends unfamiliar with the range of alternatives available to lawyers today. Yet there are lawyer corporation

presidents, lawyer hockey players, lawyer sportscasters, even lawyer actors and actresses, to name but a few.

Many nonlegal careers have a special appeal to lawyers who have training or experience in other areas. If you are one of these individuals, your legal training expands your career potential dramatically.

What is the magic of a legal education that works to broaden career potential, not only for individuals who have specialized in another field, but also for the new lawyer who simply knows that traditional law practice is not for him or her?

The magic is that, even if you failed to realize it at the time, you acquired three basic skills in law school that are not provided by any other part of our educational system. One skill or another may be emphasized in other areas, but the combination of the three is only really provided by legal training.

The first skill is the ease with which you now handle legal terminology and legal concepts. Just as the law touches the life of almost every individual today, so it touches every business enterprise. For example, the organization you work for enters into a contract with another; how many of your fellow workers will be able to read that contract and understand what must be done to

comply with its terms? Or new legislation is pending which will impact on your organization. Others may note the same legislation, but be unable to define its potential effect because they don't understand the language. Yet this language has become second nature to you.

The second skill you have acquired is analyzing facts. Don't take this skill for granted; it was pounded into you in three or four years of law school training until you do it automatically. Yet it is a skill that applies itself easily to all types of business and organizational problems, not just legal cases.

The third skill is that of persuading others of the correctness of your conclusions. This skill increases in value as you move upward in the business world. The better able you are to persuade others to your point of view or suggested course of action, the greater your chance of success with your project or idea.

These three skills are not only basic to your value in a nonlegal position, but they are also fundamental to obtaining your entry into the business world. This article will show you how to use these points to best advantage in obtaining the position you want.

One of the inescapable facts of any career decision is that it will have both its pros and cons. Since your needs, interests, and

abilities have not duplicated those of any other person, it is vitally important that you give careful consideration to all the factors that might bear upon your final decision.

One other important consideration as you consider changing your career directions:

You may already find business administration and management interesting and challenging; this discovery may be the single biggest motivation toward your deciding on a nonlegal business management career.

Another consideration is the sheer number of possibilities open to you as well as the evidence that the options will increase in the future. There is also the potential for you as an entrepreneur, with more possibilities for matching your particular talents and skills to specific opportunities.

Mobility is enhanced; the skills you acquire in nonlegal positions can be transferred far more easily to new geographic areas than can the skills of practicing lawyers, for whom bar admission requirements provide an inhibiting factor to easy relocation.

The final consideration is crucial, and difficult to assess. This involves

looking into the future, projecting your anticipated needs and desires, then balancing them against future developments within the fields you are considering, including the traditional legal profession.

In many nonlegal positions, bar admission is not essential to success, although it might enhance opportunities for future promotion.

In addition to admission to the bar, an employer in a nonlegal field is likely to consider other factors as important. With a little imagination and some practice, you should be able to analyze the requirements for any position by asking four basic questions.

1. Are any specific technical skills required? For example, it is probable that an accounting undergraduate degree would be necessary in the financial area. Ability to understand the terminology of a contract would probably be necessary in the contract administration field. For a position where no specific technical skills appear to be required, by analyzing your own experience and training you can pinpoint your skills which place you ahead of the competition. It may also serve to eliminate consideration of posts for which you do

not have the necessary technical background.

2. What degree of educational development is required for satisfactory job performance? You should know why a law degree better qualifies you for the position than any other which may be specified—and why a law degree better qualifies you for the position than any other applicant. If a company has not defined a position in terms of a law degree, then it is to your competitive advantage to be able to point out why a lawyer's skills are necessary.

3. What personality qualities are required, and which are desirable? Assume from the outset that every organization is seeking the most intelligent and highly motivated people it can find, and that leadership potential and the ability to work effectively with others are also prime considerations. Some of the intangible characteristics employers look for which you will want to demonstrate include: Initiative, planning, creativity, adaptability, versatility, concentration, decisiveness and articulateness.

All of the above are qualities which contribute, obviously, to successful job performance. At this

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Titles in the Career Series cover general information to those who seek to use their legal professional achievement in the service of others. They also provide general information on specialized practices for those who wish to focus on particular areas of the law.

In the book, *How to Start and Build a Law Practice*, second edition, by Jay Foonberg, you will find the answers to questions on billing procedures, whether you should hire a secretary or receptionist, if you should share office space, what kind of filing system works best, and how to get—and keep—clients. This is a step-by-step guide to starting your own practice, staying in it, and staying profitable.

*Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers: In the Private Sector*, second edition, by Frances Utley, tells you how to capitalize on all of your lawyering skills to secure a nonlegal position. You'll learn what to consider in making the career switch, what types of positions are available in business organizations, and how to find and get a nonlegal position. If you've ever felt that the traditional practice of law may not be exactly what you want to do, this book will help you weigh your alternatives and use your legal skills to their fullest advantage.

Another book, *Now Hiring: Government Jobs for*

*Lawyers*, edited by Moira K. Griffin, provides complete descriptions and application instructions on thousands of legal positions in more than a hundred government offices, including the legislative branch, the judicial branch, executive department and independent agencies.

The newest book in the Career Series, *Careers in Labor Law*, by Ellen Wayne, explores the options available to you in this specialty area. Included are descriptions of different types of labor law practice, narratives of typical days in the lives of labor lawyers, listing of law firms with labor law specialties, and sources of further labor law information.

The Career Series is a joint effort of the ABA's Section of Economics of Law Practice, the Law Student Division, and the Standing Committee on Professional Utilization and Career Development. Copies of all books are available for \$14.95 + \$2 handling (regular price) each, or \$9.95 + \$2 handling (Economics of Law Practice Section and Law Student Division price) each from: ABA, Order Fulfillment 511, 750 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60611. Allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.

Another book, *Opportunities in Law Careers*, by Gary A. Munneke, also touches upon nonlegal careers. *Opportunities in Law Careers* is published by VGM Career Horizons, 4255 W. Touhy Ave., Lincolnwood, IL 60046-1975.

—Paula S. Tsurutani

point, however, what you seek to do is to isolate those traits that would be most conducive to performance in a specific area. As you analyze your own personal strengths against the probable qualities needed in the area that you are considering, you will better be able to judge whether you have found a match, and also to assess yourself against other possible applicants for the position.

4. What is the degree of industry knowledge and procedural know-how required to successfully fill the demands of the position? The importance of this last question to you as you begin a nonlegal business career is that it defines the type of position which you will be seeking.

Clearly, obtaining a nonlegal position allowing you to utilize the skills you have acquired in law school and practice requires a different approach than if you were seeking another position in legal practice. In both areas, however, more positions are probably lost through failure to do adequate homework than for any other reason.

Business organizations throughout the country are eagerly seeking bright new people who will make productive, profitable contributions. They have no central clearinghouse available through which they may seek you out, so they must depend upon your contacting them concerning the qualifications you offer. You will need your own system if you are to conduct an effective search. The first step is to decide how you will limit the search; there are more than 18,000 businesses listed in national directories such as *Poor's Directory of Corporations* or *Moody's*.

You can set limits in several ways; if you have already decided on a general area, you can limit your search to those companies likely to have substantial activity in that field. Again, you may wish to limit your search geographically. Or you may wish to limit your search to a particular type of business or organization—such as banks over merchandise companies, chemical companies over heavy industry. At all times, keep in mind that you can expand or contract your search as your circumstances and the results may make advisable. Determine your priorities.

One useful volume is the *Guide to American Directories*. This volume is broken down by subject categories in which the directory title, publisher's address, and cost are provided. There are a tremendous number of

## IS THERE LIFE AFTER YOUR FIRST JOB?

Are you searching for new directions, new energy and new challenges—and perhaps new income—while remaining in or near the active profession of law? A Young Lawyers Division panel at the 1985 ABA Annual Meeting in Washington reported on trends in legal career alternatives.

Several panel members recognized that job changes are inevitable, even necessary, in the profession—and offered tips on smooth and profitable job-changing techniques.

"You never burn your bridges in this profession," warned Percy R. Luney Jr., assistant dean at North Carolina Central University. "Even if you don't like the job you're at, never burn bridges. Each person you meet may provide an avenue for a different challenge." Since graduating from Harvard University Law School in 1974, Luney has made at least five career switches, from practicing labor law to teaching courses on the economic and legal implications of geology.

Luney is just one of an increasing number of lawyers, who are looking at nonlegal careers, said Ellen Wayne, director of career development and placement at the New England School of Law. Lawyers are valuable to nonlegal employers for their research, writing, and negotiating skills, and for the ability to analyze and understand complex regulatory language, she said.

According to Wayne, growth areas for lawyers seeking nonlegal work include arbitration, education, communications, business and sales management, government relations, real estate, insurance, and positions in the legal administration of the justice system.

Janice Goldman, president of Lawyers' Lawyer, Inc., suggested another alternative for those who enjoy legal work but need to adapt their career to their lifestyle, and not vice versa. Lawyers' Lawyer performs all varieties of legal services

—including litigation—on a project-by-project basis for government agencies, businesses, and other law firms. Goldman said her company's employees can be characterized as falling into four main groups: "supermoms," who have practiced law but now have children; "lifestylers," those who work only in certain seasons; government attorneys who retire early; and sole practitioners in need of additional revenue.

"There is no better way to control your own destiny than to be your own boss," stated James A. Jennings, who worked at a law firm for 10 months before quitting to co-found Dallas' Erhard, Ruebel & Jennings. Jennings disliked the idea that other lawyers were determining his salary—and by implication, his worth. "So I decided the only way to make money in this business is to let the clients pay your salary, because they don't know what you're worth," he said.

"Few people can practice a lifetime guided only by love of the law," Jennings said. "If you're not making at least \$200,000 a year after 10 years of being a small practitioner, you're in the wrong business. Working as a small-firm lawyer is too hard if you're not making a lot of money at it."

For those contemplating a career move, Christine White and Jeanne Q. Svikhart of White, Svikhart & Associates, a Washington, D.C., consulting firm, provided some practical guidance for what they called the "ego-threatening" job hunt. Saying that self-assessment is the most important factor, White advised, "Identify your areas of interest, highlight your strengths, emphasize what you want to do more of, and know your job market."

The resume is all-important, added Svikhart, and it must be evaluated critically. "The hardest part is removing the ego. Step back and use your common sense. Remember that you have 20 to 30 seconds to grab a potential employer's attention."

such specialized directories, including almost certainly one that pertains to your own interests, no matter how specialized.

Still another valuable reference is the *Encyclopedia of Associations*. Business enterprises in the same  
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## DECIDING ON A NONLEGAL CAREER (from page 21)

area of activity will usually have a trade association, which will be listed in the Encyclopedia. Most associations can provide you with background information in the field, and you can find valuable information in their publications and other career materials.

Rounding out this roster of background materials is the *Business Periodicals Index*. Arranged by subject matter, this volume provides the addresses and subscription rates for all periodicals in specialized fields.

As you develop your prospect list, you may find yourself particularly interested in several specific companies or organizations. In many instances, you can obtain more complete information directly from the organization. Still another source of information regarding corporations is the annual stockholders' report. Although this is often a "good news" report intended for investors, it can give you a wealth of background information.

What kind of information do you need to know? Anything that contributes to a productive contact and promotes more effective interviewing. There are some basic information needs:

First is the name of the individual within the business organization who will receive your initial contact. Try to make it the head of the special area in which you are interested; if you have been unable to locate this information in a directory, call the company headquarters directly.

As you develop your information, keep asking yourself three questions: What are this employer's needs or problems, and how might I contribute to solutions? How can my skills solve their problems? How will hiring me save them money?

A word of caution: Hiring you will not be the salvation of the company. That is not your goal at this point. What you are seeking is ways in which your employment will be an asset to the organization. For example, how can your legal training enable you to do the company's work more quickly, more thoroughly, more profitably?

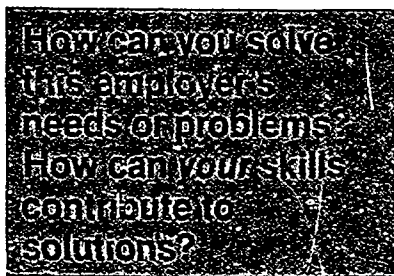
Any business organization will want to know other aspects of your education and training that will be pertinent to job performance, your previous work experience, and the duties and responsibilities involved. Use your imagination to determine

how your experiences will contribute to the business career you are seeking.

The personnel office is often a major stumbling block for lawyers seeking business careers. One factor is the seemingly impersonal attitude of corporate personnel departments, and the paperwork necessary to handle recruitment. Consider your own job search program and the amount of paperwork involved, multiply this many times over, and you will have some idea of the difficulties faced by personnel administrators in large organizations.

The individuals you will be talking to in personnel measure their effective job performance by their ability to recruit and to channel into appropriate slots the most qualified people. Thus it is in their best interests, as well as yours, to communicate as freely and fully as possible.

The skilled nonlegal employment interviewer, you will find, operates differently than the law office employer for whom the practice of law is the major activity, not interviewing. In part, the differences reflect basic goals. The law office interviewer wants to know what kind of a lawyer you will make; the business interviewer wants to know not only your work skills, but also the type of person you are, and your potential for success within the organization.



You can expect questions concerning your educational background, but they will not concentrate solely on your legal training. Don't be surprised if the interviewer asks you which subjects you liked best in elementary school, or what you liked least. When any work experience is discussed, anticipate being asked what you feel you did best and where you felt you were less effective. Questions as to how you felt about teachers and supervisors are almost routine. You may be asked to describe your parents' personalities, or the differences you see between yourself and your brothers and

sisters. Obviously, such questions are somewhat difficult to respond to spontaneously; by thinking them through, you are better prepared to respond. The interviewer is seeking information about the kind of person you are, how you relate to others, and what special strengths you feel you have. Even the best resume and application cannot supply that.

The second focus of the interviewer concerns those skills that would enhance your performance in the position which you are seeking. Obviously, this gives you opportunity to discuss how your legal education would be applicable. In addition, the analysis you did in preparing to write your resume will be most useful. Think of this not only in terms of skills applicable to the position for which you are applying, but also in terms of future flexibility to meet the requirements of advanced positions with greater responsibilities.

Keep your mind open not only to those tangible skills you have but also to intangible ones. For example, are you a leader? How do you deal with problems? How do your peers react to you? How do you deal with "difficult" people? Answers to questions such as these will probably highlight skills you have barely perceived before.

A single interview within a business organization is unlikely to result in an employment offer. If the initial interview is with someone in the personnel department, no decision will be reached until you have talked with one or more individuals under whose supervision you would be launching your business career. The questions may vary, but you will probably find that the essential approach remains the same.

You may be somewhat discouraged when you contemplate the amount of research to be done, the difficult self-analysis necessary to produce a good resume, and the multitude of contacts and interviews you will have. Keep in mind, however, that an effective job search has one clear aim: the locating of a challenging and interesting position, in which you can contribute all the skills and abilities you possess.

*Adapted from the book, Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers: In The Private Sector, by Gary A. Munneke and Frances Utley, published by the American Bar Association.* **B**