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Reassessment

Skills and Professional Development





I recently had the privilege of considering a potential career move. A conversation with a colleague I met through ACC led to a meeting with representatives of another organization to discuss a position with their company. Although I decided not to pursue the opportunity, the contemplation of such a change ignited some major soul searching as I pondered the question of “What do I really want?” How many of us take the time to really ask that of ourselves? How often do we reassess our careers and ponder whether or not we are where we want to be?

Every year I receive a renewal notice from the insurance company that underwrites our home and auto insurance; and every year the premium rates increase. In the three months leading up to the renewal, I also receive a plethora of notices from insurance agents hoping to win my business by advertising comparable rates.

This last year, I noticed a sizable rate increase even though my husband and I had never had any claims on our house or cars with this company. Armed with the knowledge that many other agents were offering lower rates than mine, I contacted the insurance company to inquire why our renewal premium rate was so much higher than what other agents were offering. The representative stated that the increase was due to overall claims in the market, not necessarily our personal record of claims. However, the representative also stated that if there had been any changes to our house or vehicles, I could request a reassessment of the premium.

So I did. I was transferred to another agent who asked me questions about our house, our driving records, and even our educational backgrounds. In participating in this reassessment, I discovered that we were eligible for rate discounts for a number of factors including having advanced degrees and the specific colleges we attended. Apparently, the insurance company had worked out an arrangement to offer special discounts to alumni from certain universities. Unless I had taken the reassessment, I would have never known this. The reassessment resulted in a premium decrease of half our current rate. Before concluding the call, the agent advised me to request a reassessment

every three to five years to take into account any new information that could result in lower rates again.

Reflecting on that advice, it occurs to me that perhaps we should all apply the same practice to our professional careers. Instead of waiting for an outside occurrence such as company merger or sale, a layoff or unexpected job opportunity to move the needle on our careers, we should take it upon ourselves to regularly conduct an assessment of where we are and whether or not we still want to be there. We should constantly be asking ourselves: “What do I want?” And then: “What do I need to do to get it?”

Is what you are doing today still satisfying and challenging or do you need to be doing something different? Do you even still want to practice law? By the way, it’s okay if you answered “no” to that last question. Really, it is.

During a recent vacation, I toured the Center for Furniture Craftsmanship in Rockport, Maine. The center offers one- to two-week classes as well as six-month to nine-month intensives for people interested in woodworking. During the tour, my husband and I met a gentleman enrolled in the nine-month intensive. I asked him why he had decided to take the nine-month course. He told us that he was an architect who had a successful practice in the city but that instead of designing, he was spending more time dealing with budgets and schedules. He was taking time off to get back into design and work with his hands. We complimented him on being courageous enough to take that leap. He seemed surprised by our reaction, but also very grateful. He told us that other people had not reacted so positively to his decision. It does take great courage to ask yourself “What do you want?” and step outside of your comfort zone to pursue it.

When was the last time you took out a legal pad and drew a line down the middle and wrote out the pros and cons of your current job? Is there anything under the “con” list of your job that could be changed or reassigned elsewhere? Is there anything under the “pro” list that could be even better or expanded?

If you haven’t evaluated the pros and cons of your work recently, or ever, it’s about time to do it.

We become so comfortable in what we do, or we become too accustomed to our environment, that we don’t stop to think about whether or not what we do still actually makes us happy.

It’s important to reassess whether or not we are still happy in our current positions, for the sake of ourselves as well as our families. If the self-examination results in a decision to leave the legal profession, that’s OK. And it’s also OK to remain exactly where you are if you are still enjoying it.

As career professionals, the question isn’t “What do you want to be when you grow up?” The question is “What do you want to be when you grow?”

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