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**It All Starts with a Dream**

**Skills and Professional Development**



It's now three months into 2018. How are you doing on your New Year's resolutions, or whatever you choose to call them? Are you still on track? Have you already forgotten what they were? If you are like most people, your resolutions are a thing of the past. If you are still in it to win it, congratulations and keep up the good work!

As you know, I'm big on goal-setting and achieving. I set resolutions and intend on keeping them. But this year, I'm taking a step back and am revisiting something that I've only done intermittently since childhood — I'm dreaming. Dreaming of who I want to be, what I want to do, and how I want to live.

Furthermore, I'm dreaming big. Why the distinction? Quite honestly, it's because I feel like I've lost my way and want to make sure I stay in touch with the bigger picture of my life and its potential.

Dreaming is different than setting goals. The dream is the destination, whereas goal-setting is the path that gets us there. Dreaming allows us to not worry about the details and instead focus on things that make us happy. When was the last time you just sat in your chair, whether in your office or at home, and just smiled? Can you think of a time that you smiled for the things you've accomplished, for the people in your life, for the plans you have next weekend, or for no reason at all — a smile for its own sake?

Smiling makes you, and those around you, feel good. And if you'll get over the self-consciousness you feel for breaking into a spontaneous smile, you will see that you can turn your day around. You

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will be more productive and better able to handle challenges that come your way.

But back to the focus of my column: dreaming. Dreaming, as opposed to goal-setting, is not about being smart, measurable, achievable, realistic, or time bound. Dreaming is the exact opposite of that. It simply allows you to explore all that can be.

Most achievements in human history have started with a dream. This magazine or the computer you are reading this article on was the result of somebody's dream. The company that you work for started as a wild concept in the founder's head long before the planning stages began to take shape and the lawyers stepped in to assess the risks.

When you first dreamed of becoming a lawyer, you were not concerned with how to make it happen. That came later. Why do we give up our dreams? And why is it that prior to our visions becoming something we can tangibly see and touch, we face discouragement from the practical among us trying to avoid risks? Neither side can survive without the other. Dreamers and doers need each other.

Here are five guidelines for dreaming to get you started.

**Dreaming in and of itself will set in motion how the dream will become reality.** There is no need when you are dreaming and creating your vision to spend time thinking about whether your dream is realistic or achievable; that is not relevant at this stage of the process. Your only task is to create the possibilities.

**Focus only on what you want.** Dreaming is not the time to think about what you don't want to happen. The better approach is to think about the outcome you truly want, picture it, and let your creative process flow.

**Be as creative and free as possible.** We love to watch children in their fantasy play, expanding their natural imaginations. We should think and be as free with our creativity as children.

**Leave the inner critic at home.** There will be enough people to criticize your dreams for being too unrealistic or costly, so there is no reason for you to pile on and dampen your creativity. You're doing their job for them.

**Share only with people who understand dreaming. It is often hard for non-dreamers to understand the visions of dreamers.** As a result, don't share your dreams with people who will tear them down. You can save that for your implementation stage when you are identifying challenges and solutions for them.

The point is to be as free as possible with your thinking and not constrain your creativity. The most important thing is to give yourself permission to dream again.

[Whitnie Wiley](#)



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**Whitnie Wiley** was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the Lead the Way column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.