

Firing Up Commitment to Your Career©

By Chere B. Estrin

July 9, 2003

Firing Up Commitment to Your Career

By

Chere B. Estrin

What a summer we're having! Seminars, career coaching, speaking engagements, writing! Since designing my career the way I have always envisioned it, I have to say, I am having the time of my life. Finally! <sigh> I took a long look at the type of work I had been doing over the past 16 years and decided what was missing was purpose. By putting purpose and passion back into my career, I've discovered something awesome: What a joy it is to come to work every morning!

In this column, I've taken the liberty of sharing some thoughts with you about firing up commitment for strategic career planning. All I can say is, once you're dedicated to the thought of changing your career to suit your hopes, wants, dreams and desires, the results can be phenomenal. I would love to hear some success stories on this subject from some of our readers.

At one time or another, you may have the experience that jobs can be such a drag. Day in and day out, year after billable year. Routine and repetitious work. More and more pressure to bill more and more time. Same old, same old. One crisis after another; one more fire to put out and you'll get a medal for the Extinguished Smokey the Bear Award.

Monotony creeps in. Enthusiasm disappears. Once vibrant souls physically perform but mentally snore. Drugged by lack of meaning and slowed by inhibitions, legal professionals can grind to a halt- never realizing the power within to create change.

Change requires commitment. A commitment is the pledging or binding of an individual to a course of action. Most people, when they agree to do something, will usually stick to that commitment. Not honoring a commitment has the same effect as being caught in a lie. Without a strong sense of purpose, commitment to your career can rarely be fulfilled.

Put a cause on the table, however, and watch your career come alive. Legal Professionals who are fired up by a strong sense of purpose are full of passion and energized. They put their hearts and souls into their work. Here's a very simple fact: People don't really care about working for a firm or corporation. *They want to work for a purposeful movement.*

If you are putting in your time, operating on fumes, watching the clock, grateful for the weekends, it's time to transcend the dullness of everyday career lives. There is an aspiration, a purpose that you can live by, identify with, and commit to. And here's the secret: For those of you waiting for some visible sign from the "Career Goddess", it may be a long, long wait. No one else can tell you what will work for you. No one else can make your career "happen." Only you know what purpose works for you.

Dry, commercial goals will not fire up commitment to your career. Law firm professionals have a very hard time getting too emotionally involved with financial objectives such as 1800 hour minimum billables, recruiting 25 new associates, or increasing partner profits. In-house staff rarely found that "getting to \$100 million in revenues in five years" really fires them up.

Employees need a grand purpose, a mission with a larger meaning, a cause that means they are contributing something that has value. "Increased market share" or "10 percent pretax profit" doesn't exactly inspire anyone. Law firms wonder why strategic goals don't live up to expectations. The organization asks more of everyone but fails to tie that request to the heartstrings of employees.

I don't recall hearing the beloved Martin Luther King say, "I have a strategic plan." Instead, he shouted, "I have a dream!" and created a movement. Start first strategically and follow up with objectives and action plans. Driving your plan are your dreams and purpose.

The secret to success in creating your strategic career plan is in commitment to change. That goal is attained through a chance to achieve; otherwise, organizations and professionals end up with hollow people. And people who don't believe in themselves can deliver little of their potential.

The triumph someone feels in doing things right is a natural motivator and the best payoff. This feeling goes further than a tangible reward. A survey of video arcades showed that rewarding

high scores with free games did little to increase playing. People plunk in their coins to see how well they can do.

Planning your career should take into account the need to achieve, feel important, gain recognition, and build momentum. Many professionals end up in jobs they didn't actually think they were applying for and now don't really know what they want. It's like getting caught up in a tornado with no way out. Whenever I am a guest speaker, I pose the question to attendees: "What do you want?" The room inevitably goes silent. When I ask, "What don't you want?" the room rocks and rolls.

Take a look at your objectives. How do they compare with your current situation? Your objectives must tie into reality that includes market conditions, dollars, your strengths and weaknesses, education, specialties, time constraints and talent. If, for example, one of your objectives is to become president of a national association but one of your weaknesses is fear of public speaking, you either need to join Toastmasters or find another objective.

Now, let's tie this all back to purpose. If you concentrate on your objective, ask yourself: Why would I do this? What purpose does it serve? Who does it serve? Where is the excitement, the passion? Is this something I like to do or simply a transitory move? Who benefits from my role and why? What steps do I need to take to achieve my objectives. What timeframe is realistic?

You may find that the idea of pushing your career forward, getting the recognition you deserve and taking your profession one more rung up the ladder is exciting to you. You can get behind the cause with personal involvement and a hands-on approach, ultimately furthering your profession. For some, this is a truly realistic, electrifying and thought provoking change.

By defining your purpose or career mission, you will build a dynamic sense of momentum in your career. Progress is compelling. Watch how others flock around when things start to come together for you. Everyone wants to be around a winner and in my book, that winner may as well be you.

Chere B. Estrin is the CEO of Career Coaches International, a Los Angeles based training and career coaching organization. She is the author of 8 books including The Paralegal Career

Guide Third Edition (Prentice-Hall) and The Successful Paralegal's Job Search Guide (Thomson-West). She has been interviewed by Newsweek, The Los Angeles Times, The Chicago Tribune, Entrepreneur magazine, Working Woman and more. She is a Century City/Los Angeles Woman of Achievement Award winner. She can be reached at CareerCoaches@aol.com; www.CareerCoachesInternational.com.