

Writing the Plan for Your Recovery

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The economic crisis isn't improving, and the legal profession seems to be getting hit particularly hard. Firms of all sizes are cutting associates, staff, and even some partners as they hunker down for what promises to be a "cruel, cruel summer." What's your plan for the recovery? Are you lying low and waiting it out, cutting out unnecessary expenses, finally reading up on tax law and taking those Spanish lessons? Or are you putting yourself in charge of your own future?

In a recent post on *Are You Writing This Down?*, I made the case for developing your own antidote for an unhealthy future: a plan of action. Not overly complicated, not filled with platitudes, not so detailed that you can never start. Just a plan that requires you to think about where you are, where you want to be, and what you need to do to get there. A plan that sets some realistic, aggressive, and measurable goals. A plan that you can revise often to account for the new opportunities that each of your successes creates.

Some ideas to consider as you work through your plan:

- **Focus on opportunities, not problems** (I learned this reading Peter Drucker). It's easy to say "this won't work" or "we don't have the resources for that" or "there's no way we can get a meeting with the GC." But that won't get you anywhere. Think instead about what you can achieve, what will work, what you know makes sense. Identify the opportunities—the true opportunities, the ones you measure in terms of probability not possibility—and the steps needed to realize them. You'll solve the real problems when you get to them.
- **Remember the client.** It's all about the client. If your opportunity doesn't make sense for the client, doesn't save them time or money or stress or reputation, how could it add value? Would you buy a second car from your dealer just because he sells cars, because you already bought one from him and you're relatively happy with the transaction, because he's a nice guy you play golf with, because he tells you it would be a good idea? Or would you base your decision on an entirely different set of criteria than those motivating your dealer to sell you a second car? Always remember that success comes from selling what the client is buying, not the other way around.
- **Be realistic about what you can achieve.** Yes, it would be great to get all of the transactional work of your firm's biggest disputes client, but is it realistic? Do you have a story to tell that would compel that client to fire the firm it's been using for that work, for the past three decades, and hire you? It's only an opportunity if you could realistically get the work and do the job better than your competition.
- **Don't sell your own passion short.** Most of the lawyers I know chose to become lawyers because they wanted to, chose to work at their firm because they believe it offers them and their clients distinct advantages, chose to become experts in their practice because they love that type of work. Wouldn't you rather hire the gardener who stops by on her way home from another job to make sure you've been watering the new plants at the right hour of the day? Who gets excited



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while explaining the importance of a 20/30/50 mixture of bluegrass, fescue and ryegrass for your yard? Passion for what you do, for helping clients, for adding value, is a competitive advantage, but only if you're selling it. Build it into your opportunities.

- **Don't let prejudice or tradition or fear of change get in your way.** The way things have been done is not necessarily the way they will be done in the future (particularly today's future). Don't talk yourself out of pursuing an opportunity because it will require a lot of work and you've never done it before and it might even fail. Of course it's hard work. Of course it's risky. Of course it's very different from what you've done in the past. That's the price of getting into the game.

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Wouldn't you feel better about the future if you knew where it was going?