Practical Success

Cordell M. Parvin

Preparing A Business Development Plan

Recently I gave a presentation on career planning to over 200 associates in a large law firm. As I often do, I began by asking how many in the room had prepared a Personal Performance and Development Plan or Business Plan with written goals. Surprisingly only a handful had a prepared a plan. I then asked how many had begun planning their 2012 vacations. Far more hands were raised. I am always surprised that many, if not most, lawyers spend more time planning their vacations than they spend planning their careers.

Why do you suppose I think you should have a plan? I believe when you prepare a plan with written goals, you will take control of your future. In addition, if your plan and written goals are focused on something you truly value, you will feel energized, committed, and disciplined to achieve them. Finally, having a plan enables you to best use your two most important resources: your time and your energy.

Not to plan is to risk what Yogi Berra once said: "If you don't know where you are going, you are likely to end up somewhere else." I learned early in my career that without a focus, I could easily get distracted. So, it was important to me, to not only know where I was going but also to have a map to show me if I was on course for my destination. If I had not identified what I wanted in my future and charted a written course, I would not have had the discipline to take the actions necessary to get there.

You might be thinking there are many successful partners in your firm who have never had a written career plan and have instead focused on doing the highest quality work possible. I have known many successful lawyers who haven't had a written plan. They must be better able to keep things in their heads and hold themselves accountable than I am. While these lawyers are successful, I often wonder what they might have achieved had they actually written a plan for their careers.

When I speak to lawyers on planning, I share ideas from the first three habits in Dr. Stephen Covey's book The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Dr. Covey's first three habits are:

- Habit 1 — Be Proactive;
- Habit 2 — Begin with the End in Mind;
- Habit 3 — Put First Things First.

What do these habits mean to your law career? First, being proactive means that each of you is responsible for your own career. Where you are now

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in your career is a product of the cards you were dealt and the decisions you have made to date. Where you go from here is up to you. Your firm can help, but you are the one who ultimately is responsible.

Beginning with the end in mind means you must have some idea of what you want to accomplish and what you want to become as a lawyer in the future. In planning your career, you must have a vision of where you want to go and what you want to accomplish. For each of you this will be different and your ability to see the future will be different. In this part of the workshop, I asked the associates to think about where they want to be five years from now, or some time in the future more appropriate for them.

Putting first things first means establishing priorities. You can't do it all. You have to make choices. A lawyer I coached several years ago decided her priorities were:

- Her family;
- Her church;
- Her health; and
- Her clients and law firm.

Her plan was based on activities that fit her four priorities. In many instances she was able to do something that fit more than one priority. For example, she started a children's choir that included her two children. The first time they sang outside of their church was at one of her clients' nursing homes.

I have associates prepare a list of 10 things they want to accomplish. I then ask them to rank each item on their lists and to identify the one goal which, if accomplished, would have the greatest impact on their careers and lives. For each one, I suggest they answer why accomplishing it would be important to them. Without a good answer to the "why" question, they and you will not have the discipline or commitment to stay with it.

The Personal Performance and Development Plan will be of little value if it is not implemented. So how can you hold yourself accountable? First, I suggest you break down your plan into 90-day goals. Make a list of what you want to do in the next 90 days. Next, get a colleague in your firm or a friend and share your plans and 90-day goals with each other. Finally, plan each week by listing what you plan to do, estimating how much time it will take and putting it on your calendar.

At this point I asked the associates to draw a circle and put "168" in the middle. I then asked if anyone could tell me what the 168 represented. One associate raised his hand and volunteered it was the number of hours an associate should bill each month.

Looking back, that was not a bad answer, but I am sure you know what I had in mind. If you sleep 56 hours and bill 40 hours a week and plan and use 10 non-billable hours a week for your own development and client development, that leaves you with 62 waking hours a week for personal time. How well you plan and use the 10 non-billable hours will ultimately determine the quality of your career and how well you plan and use the 62 personal hours will determine the quality of your life.

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