



## A Happy Lawyer Is a Professional Lawyer

Finding enjoyment in your career can make you a better and more effective attorney

“F

ind a job you enjoy doing and you will not have to work a day in your life.” Many lawyers have found that kind of job in their law practices. This article is about them — how they find enjoyment in the practice of law and how it helps them to be more professional.

### Happy Lawyers Do Exist

“In my 20th year of practicing law,” says Stacey Romberg, a Seattle business at-

BY IRENE LEONARD

torney, “I’m pleased and happy that I like it — and I’m ready for 20 more!” Her enthusiasm stems from several sources. First and foremost, Stacey believes good health creates a foundation that allows her positive attitude in her life and practice to thrive. Stacey points out the necessity of controlling the things you can control. “We can’t control everything about our health, but we can control some things — especially whether we

sleep seven to eight hours on a regular basis, whether we exercise, and what we choose to eat.”

Second, Stacey tells me how important it is to have fun. “I’m fortunate to have some truly great clients. I not only enjoy working with them, I also enjoy having dinner with them and just chatting! If you can do interesting work, and then have a fun and team-like approach with your clients to produce solid results, what’s not to like about that?”

Wayne Blair, now an arbitrator and mediator with JAMS, enjoyed a similar team-like approach working with his clients during his 35 years as a lawyer with Montgomery Purdue Blankinship & Austin. “I particularly enjoyed the intellectual challenge of my practice and working with the same clients for many years on a day-to-day basis to develop good working relationships.” Early in his career, Wayne knew himself well enough to know that being strongly involved in the activities of the King County and Washington State bar associations would provide him with enormous satisfaction. His volunteer work with the associations “added some balance to my professional life, allowed me an opportunity to work with many lawyers and judges in a collegial setting, and gave some perspective to a stressful and busy practice.” Wayne strongly believes that lawyers, in their own way, “should contribute to the legal profession and the community as part of a satisfying, well-rounded, professional practice.”

Lish Whitson, another well-respected Seattle lawyer who enjoys his practice, agrees with Wayne about the rewards that come from volunteer activities. Lish believes: “If every attorney, after caring for his or her family, devotes the rest of their considerable talent and intellect to helping others, they will eventually look back on a life well lived with both pride and satisfaction.” Lish goes even further to point out that “the greatest joy comes from helping others who cannot help themselves.” He truly believes “the practice of law is a noble profession that allows us to live and prosper while doing something we love.”

### Qualities of Happy Lawyers

Lawyers who enjoy their practice have many things in common. They:

- Choose work that aligns with their values and strengths.
- Have a positive, resourceful attitude

- and turn worries into action by solving the problem the worry represents.
- Balance working hard with maintaining quality family relationships, health, and fun.
- Take pleasure from producing results in which they feel they accomplished something or helped someone.
- Are confident in their abilities and their appearance.
- Are continually learning, and embrace intellectual challenge.
- Strive to be the best at what they do.
- Give of themselves.
- Have many solid, respectful relationships.

- Have some degree of control over their work.

Lawyers who enjoy their practice pay attention to what they need to do to stay engaged in their practice. That means knowing themselves well enough to know what's important and striving to achieve goals that will keep their practice fulfilling.

#### Happy Lawyers Experience Flow

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced chick-SENT-me-high), renowned professor of psychology and education at the University of Chicago and director of the

Quality of Life Research Center at the Drucker School, is the architect of the notion of flow. A flow state is when you are so fully absorbed in an activity that you lose your sense of time. "It is the full involvement of flow, rather than happi-

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ness, that makes for excellence in life," Professor Csikszentmihalyi states. "When we are in flow, we are not happy, because to experience happiness we must focus on our inner states, and that would take away attention from the task at hand." He goes on to say, "Only after the task is completed do we have the leisure to look back on what has happened, and then we are flooded with gratitude for the excellence of that experience — then, in retrospect we are happy." And finally, "The happiness that follows flow is of our making and it leads to increasing complexity and growth in consciousness."<sup>1</sup>

How many times have you been so absorbed in your work that you experienced flow? Felt happy? The next time you're in the flow and complete a task, reflect on how you feel afterward. You may feel happy or satisfied but like many lawyers, be reluctant to describe it as such. The act of calling it happiness will increase your pleasure in the task and help you savor the positive feeling you work instills in you. ☺

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#### NOTES

1. Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life* (1998), p. 32.

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