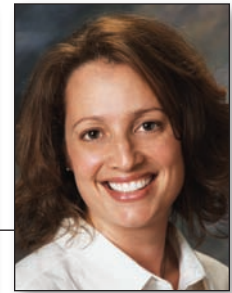


MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

Pay This Message Forward



By Steve Conley & Melissa Hoff

He Said

Tear out this page after you read it and pass it on to a few junior-level attorneys you'd like to see become senior-levels.

Well, not to go all Geico on you, but six minutes of advice from Andy Hartman, an attorney with whom I've worked, may save 60 percent or more of young attorneys' careers.

"The Six-Minute Marathon" is a quick-read book designed to teach new practitioners, law students and others about a "BigLaw" life, drawing practical examples from Hartman's time as a corporate attorney and law school educator.

Hartman said recently that holes in the law-school curriculum may impact a young attorney's ability to integrate into a firm.

"There's something missing in the law school education that is necessary to be a successful associate or, really, junior attorney at any mid- to large (legal) organization," said Hartman, 47, who a few years ago ran the junior associate review process at Cooley LLP.

These days he teaches and leads the experiential education program at the University of Colorado Law School and practices as a name-partner at a small firm. Over coffee, Hartman noted that some missing law-ed pieces revolve around marketing, internal and external. Others center upon how a firm or legal department works, formally and informally.

Young attorneys "just didn't understand what it took to be successful in their transition to practice," even if they'd gone to top schools or were extremely intelligent, Hartman said. So, about five years ago, he began the how-to book, along the way adding Caren Ulrich Stacy as editor, muse and foil. It was published earlier this year and is worth a read.

Here is a condensed version of their self-styled banter about timekeeping descriptions (though chapters on partying etiquette or Porches may be more enticing to some):

Andy: "Nothing is more irritating ... to the billing partner than having to change an associate's time entries for stylistic reasons," so they conform to group norms.

Caren: "When in doubt ... think of it from the perspective of the client ... (who) will decide based on your time entry whether or not you add value to the case. Approach timekeeping like interviewing, be flawless."

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She Said

In my conversations with attorneys throughout the years, I have been struck by how many fell into what they do. When I'm working with someone on a marketing or business development plan, I sometimes ask them who their favorite client is and how they got into the practice area in which they are currently working. These questions are often met with a flustered response in which the attorney appears to be rationalizing how and why they are doing what they do. Some smile and say, "Well, I guess when I got here, the firm needed someone to help with a matter, so I started working on it and, uh, well, you know, one thing led to the next and I guess I'm still doing it. I didn't really choose it, though." Of course, some attorneys were very deliberate about what they wanted to do and selected a law firm that would provide them with meaty experience in their chosen area.

Of course, I'm not naïve enough to think we can all know what we want to do from the outset and put ourselves on a path accordingly. I had no idea legal marketing was even a field until I fell into my first law firm job, and I certainly didn't plan to be a legal marketer when I grew up. Things evolved, as careers often do, and I found myself in a niche that I liked. So I'm sympathetic to attorneys who sometimes wonder, "How did I get here?"

We owe it to ourselves to check in periodically and ask if we're still doing what we enjoy. And we need to encourage our attorneys to do the same, because we are asking them to invest their personal time and energy into developing a career and a legal practice. If they don't enjoy the work they do, or enjoy the clients for whom they do it, or the colleagues with whom they work, it's a slog—for them and for us.

I'm not talking about "finding your bliss" necessarily; I'm saying that we all make choices and have different motivations. Attorneys who understand their work's purpose often are more satisfied than those who never give it any thought. Some attorneys are fascinated by law. Others wanted to be teachers but couldn't make enough money to support the lifestyle. Still others wanted to be prosecutors or trial attorneys, because they love the stage. The reasons matter less than just knowing what they are.

And when we know this about the attorneys we work with, they've given us a chance to help keep them motivated, or perhaps to correct course, so that they can come to work every day engaged and incentivized. ■

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