

The Sky is the Limit:

Alternative Careers for JDs

by DeWarren K. Langley

We are living through the most profound changes in the economy since the Industrial Revolution. Technology, globalization, and the accelerating pace of change have yielded chaotic markets, fierce competition, and unpredictable staffing needs. All of these trends are freeing work from the confines of the old-fashioned job where you would go to work every day to the same organization in the same building during the same hours and perform the same tasks and responsibilities in the same position for a stable chain of command. The transformation in the economy and work environment is affecting lawyers at all levels. Many law students complete law school and pass the bar exam only to ask themselves, now what?

Most commonly, law school graduates work as associates at a law firm, a clerk for a judge, legal counsel to a legislative representative, prosecutors, public defenders or corporate counsel. While those career fields are traditional options for individuals with Juris Doctorate degrees, the shifting economy and changing career interests are expanding the options for law school graduates. So, what alternative career opportunities are there for Juris Doctorates? The career opportunities for individuals with a Juris Doctorate are only limited by a person's imagination.

Relatively little is known about the career paths of lawyers. While anecdotal information abounds, no systematic national investigation of the patterns and trajectories in lawyers' careers has been undertaken. Developing a career plan requires self-analysis. Career planning is a process of continual assessment and planning for improvement. A career plan allows you to discover the skills, interests, values and motivators that will help you identify a good career fit for you.

An essential part of career awareness, purpose and planning is the ability to make good career decisions. Career decision-making involves developing a rational series of steps designed to help achieve your career goals. Choosing a career is not easy. However, you can streamline the process by focusing on three key points: what you do

best, what you like to do and what your priorities are. Clearly defining each of these areas will assist you in identifying which opportunities coincide with your career goals.

For example, Sue Wasiolek completed her J.D. and L.L.M. at Duke University in 1994. In 1994, Wasiolek joined the law firm of Maxwell, Freeman & Bowman in Durham where she practiced law for nine months. Although practicing law was challenging and interesting, Wasiolek found that she truly missed working with students. Returning to Duke University in 1995, Wasiolek is an Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Students overseeing new student and family programs, judicial affairs, fraternity and sorority life, community housing, alcohol and substance abuse prevention, mediation, and crisis response.

After law school, a graduate may forgo the practice of law altogether. Such was the case with Reginald Johnson. Johnson is the Senior Assistant to the City Manager for the City of Durham.

As a first step to determining what to do with your Juris Doctorate tally your accomplishments, your strengths, your shortcomings, and your likes and dislikes. You must look within yourself before you can realisti-

cally examine various alternatives and possibilities. Upon understanding your skills, interests and goals, examining career opportunities which fit those skills, interests and goals is essential to discovering a career path.

The career options for Juris Doctorates depend on an individual's skills, passions and priorities which are not limited by career fields.

The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics produces the Occupational Outlook Handbook which provides career information, designed to provide valuable assistance to individuals making decisions about their future work lives. The Handbook is located at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/>. The Handbook outlines the diverse facets of the nature of work, working conditions, skills required and pay for various career fields and great resources for researching alternative career paths.

After deciding on a career path, you have to find a job, which is easier said than done in the current economy. ■

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