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Alternative Careers

Ten ways to make a good living with a law degree that you might not have thought about

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Say “lawyers” and “legal jobs” and people tend to think of law firms, corporate legal departments and government agencies. So it’s no surprise that attorneys’ ears often perk up when they hear about a successful person who had been a practicing lawyer or about an individual who has a law degree but is making it in another career.

Theo Epstein, the general manager of the Boston Red Sox — that’s now the *World Champion* Boston Red Sox — may be the most envied non-practicing law school grad who topped the news during 2004 (especially given the loss suffered by the Democratic Party’s presidential and vice-presidential candidates this past November), but the fact is lawyers have found numerous

out-of-the-way niches where they are able to apply their skills in novel and remunerative ways. Certainly, many of these careers still involve the law in one way or another. Indeed, they are one, two or perhaps three steps away from practicing law and are close enough so that they all meet the career counselor’s standard advice to “stick to your knitting.”

1. Career Consulting

An attorney who wants to leave the law should do so in an organized, thoughtful way, as Cheryl Heisler did more than a dozen years ago. Having heard the cliché “a J.D. is a ticket to anything,” she analyzed how to tap into the skills she had developed as a lawyer. That led her to form a career consulting company in

Chicago, with clients nationwide, where she works with disaffected attorneys on the same issues. After a Heisler client completes a self-assessment involving “who you are and what you want right now” comes a “market assessment,” which analyzes how the market will value the skills the lawyer self-identified. Heisler then works with the lawyer to gather information and to help market him or her to prospective employers.

Heisler says that a person does not become a career consultant “to make the same money as a partner in a law firm,” but that it does have its monetary rewards: from \$50 to as much as \$200 per hour.

2. Career Coaching

Helping a lawyer change a career, as Heisler does, is one thing. The flip side is helping lawyers be more successful (and happier) as lawyers. That’s what Jatrine Bentsi-Enchill sees as her role.

Bentsi-Enchill, a North Carolina-based career coach and founder of The ESQ Development Institute, had been attracted to law because she “wanted to be an advocate for those who didn’t have a voice.” She says she “makes a difference in people’s lives” as a career coach, but the people she helps are lawyers who need advice on issues as diverse as managing their careers, creating a personal and professional development plan, and dealing with stress and the time constraints inherent to practicing law.

Individual lawyers, who can speak on the phone to Bentsi-Enchill for 30 to 40 minutes a week, pay \$500 to \$800 a month for her services, she says. Bentsi-Enchill also coaches law firms, which retain her company for six to eight months on a variety of matters, including “cultural competence,” which explains

“things that a firm needs to know to keep women and attorneys of color” from leaving for other lawyer positions or other careers.

3. Public Relations

Lawyers may know the law and litigators may know how to litigate, but the media can sometimes be a mystery, especially during a high profile trial. Recognizing that, Richard Levick formed Levick Strategic Communications, a Washington, D.C.-based public relations firm that has developed a specialty in handling “high stakes communications” for law firms and their clients.

According to Levick, this is a field for which having a law degree can be helpful, but he stresses that that is not enough. It’s also important, in his view, for a public relations consultant to be entrepreneurial, to have a good understanding of a specific industry or industries, and to have communications experience. The combination may be difficult to find. Of the 28 people on Levick’s staff, he is the only attorney. But it can be a remunerative career. “If you’re good,” he states, “compensation can range from \$200,000 to \$400,000 per year,” with more for an owner.

4. Marketing Consulting

One of the growth fields over the past few years has been law firm marketing. Outside consultants serve law firms in a variety of capacities, including the “brand design” niche filled by Greenfield/Belser Ltd., which has offices in Washington, D.C., and Boston.

Donna Greenfield was a lawyer at the Federal Trade Commission in the 1970s monitoring advertising for truthfulness when she met Burkey Belser, a graphic designer. She says that after the U.S. Supreme Court issued its 1977 ruling in *Bates v. Arizona*, they

recognized that lawyers would be able to advertise and use marketing communications materials such as brochures and capability pieces, within certain ethical constraints, that she as a lawyer could understand. Greenfield/Belser was born.

Greenfield believes that law firm marketing will continue to provide opportunities for lawyers (and others) in the future. The compensation, she states, is “good,” although she warns that lawyers seeking to leave practice for law firm marketing “may have to come to terms with some financial issues.”

5. In-House Marketers

By no means does law firm marketing involve only consulting work. Today, more and more law firms — small, local, regional and large national and international firms — are adding marketing professionals to their staffs.

A search of the Legal Marketing Association’s Web site finds numerous in-house marketing positions available, from chief marketing officer and marketing director to marketing manager and marketing coordinator. Depending on the firm, the position and the candidate’s qualifications, top salaries can exceed \$200,000 per year.

What’s more, being a lawyer and having practiced can help land a position and can increase the compensation level; among other things, a lawyer in charge of a firm’s marketing efforts may be able to become a partner and share in the firm’s profits.

6. Legal Publishing

Since he graduated from law school, Steve Errick has focused his career on publishing. He began working on books, journals and newsletters for lawyers. Now, as a publisher at Foundation Press, which specializes in law school

textbooks, his target market is law students.

Legal publishing clearly is a growth industry; new court decisions, laws, and regulations keep coming at what seems to be an ever-increasing pace. Errick points out, though, that the legal publishing industry is consolidating, with an occasional exception. That may make it difficult to obtain a job in legal publishing unless a lawyer is willing to move to a publishing center such as New York City or Rochester, N.Y.

Salaries have increased since Errick first applied for an \$18,000 copy-editing job in 1989 at Clark Boardman Callaghan. Today, Errick says, entry-level editors can earn in the low 40s and experienced editors can reach the mid-80s. Management employees are paid salaries comparable to supervisory positions in other industries, according to Errick.

Another way to enter the legal publishing field is through sales. Rhonda Dohanick, who sells Westlaw products to law firms and government agencies in Philadelphia, is often “out with customers, networking with people and attending functions” as part of her sales work. Dohanick, who receives a salary, commission and benefits, and has her expenses paid, points out that a salesperson who “learns the product and builds a reputation as someone lawyers can go to for research” can do quite well. It is possible to start “in the six figures,” she says, and “go up.”

7. Legal Journalism

If the legal publishing field can be said to cover developments in the law, then legal journalists explore developments in the business or practice of law. Here, too, it helps to have a law degree. Jill Chanen, a 1989 law school graduate, is

the legal affairs writer for the *ABA Journal*. And former practicing lawyer Monica Bay is editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Law Technology News*, which covers technology “products, systems and services” for the legal profession. Bay is also editorial director of two new publications on the business of law: *Law Firm Inc.*, which targets large law firm management, and *Small Firm Business*, addressing issues of concern to firms with fewer lawyers.

Bay warns lawyers interested in journalism about “golden handcuffs,” those high lawyer salaries that can affect a lawyer’s willingness to take a lower paying journalist position (an entry level editorial assistant position at a trade publication still pays only \$22,000). Nevertheless, both she and Chanen say they find the business of law fascinating, and their desire to write and have a good lifestyle trump the financial issues.

8. The Internet

Although the Internet boom went bust for many, it still offers opportunities for some, including former practicing lawyers.

For example, Patrick Della Valle saw a market for information on the Internet. Believing that law firms were unable to place highly in search engines, he founded the Employment Law Information Network, a Web site that lists employment articles written by law firms that visitors can read by clicking on relevant links. Della Valle, who practiced law for several years in New York City and then relocated to Wilkes-Barre, charges a yearly fee to law firms to list their articles. He also generates revenue through Google’s “AdSense” program, an attorney directory and contracts with third-party vendors

interested in reaching the human resources professionals who visit his site.

9. Independent CLE

When he was practicing law, Roy Ginsburg discovered that he liked providing training to clients. He left practice and obtained Minnesota’s approval as a continuing legal education provider. Of course, CLE providers are subject to individual state rules, but Ginsburg sees “a trend, more and more, to paid speakers.” The reason is straightforward: By retaining Ginsburg for \$1,000 and up per day, firms can have their lawyers perform billable work rather than prepare and deliver CLE courses.

10. Legal Finance

Small law firms that represent plaintiffs in personal injury, class action and employment discrimination matters often have cash flow problems. Several dozen companies across the United States address these concerns, but New Jersey-based RD Legal Funding, for which former practicing lawyer Mark Pruner serves as vice president of marketing, is somewhat different. RD “buys post-settlement fees from lawyers.”

RD’s sales have increased by 600 percent over the past two years, according to Pruner, and the legal factoring world seems likely to continue growing. Although the largest law firms keep getting bigger, more and more lawyers open their own offices every day, and these firms will need financing. There may be no better alternative than obtaining funding from a company with a former practicing lawyer in senior management.

Resources

Books

Alternative Careers for Lawyers, by Hillary Mantis

The Lawyer's Career Change Handbook: More Than 300 Things You Can Do With A Law Degree, by Hindi Greenberg

Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers, by Gary A. Munneke

What Can You Do With a Law Degree?: A Lawyer's Guide to Career Alternatives Inside, Outside & Around the Law, by Deborah Arron

Web sites

www.attorneyjobs.com

www.pbi.org (the Pennsylvania Bar Institute)

www.jdbliss.com

www.lawmarketing.com