

FINDING THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

FROM ANTITRUST LAWYER TO EXECUTIVE COACH

BY DEBORAH KATZ SOLOMON

Four years ago I was an antitrust lawyer with a large law firm in Washington, D.C. Today I am the owner of a consulting company providing executive coaching for lawyers in the areas of leadership, management, communication and business development. While navigating this transition was not without effort and risk, I enjoy the challenge and creativity of coaching and my career now feels like just the right fit.

Of course, when I graduated from law school more than a decade ago, I never expected my career would take this turn. As I developed into an experienced lawyer, however, I became more interested in the business of law than in practice itself. My interest began to shift to professional development—specifically the link between individual performance, personal satisfaction and law firm profitability. What distinguishes the best lawyers and the most profitable firms? What resources can lawyers draw on to maintain and build on their success over time? How might I play a role in it all?

FIRST STEPS TO CAREER CHANGE

Following my curiosity, I began researching the areas of professional development and organizational leadership. I looked beyond the legal profession to find models and approaches that had succeeded in the corporate arena. Executive coaching captured my attention, in part because of its proven success in helping senior business leaders be more effective within their organizations. I focused on applying similar models of executive coaching to the legal profession and then outlined a business plan.

I also took a series of personality, aptitude and strength assessment tests to

learn more about my skills and preferred work styles. The results revealed entrepreneurial and interpersonal strengths that I had not fully utilized as a lawyer, as well as an interest in working in a more direct counseling role. Together with some less formal self-assessments, the data became a guidepost as I developed a career plan that would be a better fit than the traditional practice of law.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS AND MARKET RESEARCH

My next step was to consult coaches already in the field as well as small business owners. Those informational interviews proved to be an invaluable forum for questions such as: What would it take to build a coaching practice? What challenges could I expect? What training and preparation would I need? The conversations informed my choices and expanded my professional network. Although independent by nature, I learned to ask for help early and often.

My lawyer colleagues and contacts also provided important input on each stage of my business plan. To this day I consider that group to be my informal advisory board and its feedback ensures that my business plans are aligned with market reality. I now have the best of both worlds—the autonomy and creativity of running my own business as well as the support and sense of community I always enjoyed as a law firm lawyer.

Financial Planning, Training and Business Launch

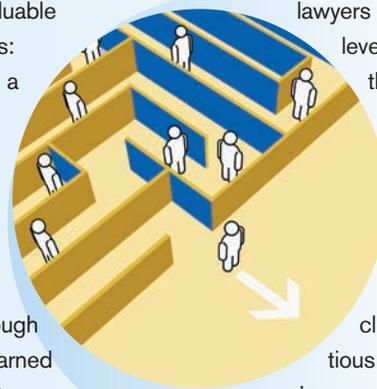
Making the move from a salaried job to a start-up business required thoughtful

financial planning. I maintained my license to practice law and worked on part-time projects to bridge the financial gap after leaving my law firm job. At the same time, I attended and graduated from Georgetown University's leadership coaching program and invested in additional training to build credentials and a solid foundation for my new career. At times I found it challenging to be a beginner again, and I worked hard to recalibrate my expectations and be patient with the transition process. Within a year of leaving my law firm job, I was ready to launch the new business.

In the years since, I have worked with lawyers across the country at all levels of experience. Rather than help others transition out of practice as I did, my specialty is working with lawyers who want to invest more deeply and be more effective right where they are. My clients are sharp, ambitious and goal-oriented, which makes my work incredibly stimulating. On a personal level, I find great fulfillment in helping top lawyers break old habits and become more effective managers, leaders and business developers—for their benefit and also for the benefit of their law firms and organizations.

Work plays such an important role in each of our identities. I am proud to have created a career that suits me and that provides a platform to help others in the legal profession become more effective and more satisfied with their careers as well. LP

Deborah Katz Solomon (dsolomon@acuitylegal.com) is the founder and principal of Acuity Legal Consulting, which specializes in one-on-one executive coaching for lawyers at all levels of expertise.



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