Chapter 1

How to Use This Book or “Taking a Stand”

I. How to Use This Book

Congratulations! If you are reading this book, you are already demonstrating a commitment to practicing law in a new and innovative way that will respect who you are as a person; that will bring excellence to your practice, balance to your life; and that will ultimately have you feeling better and working more productively!

Just some notes as you prepare for your journey: For the most part, you can skip around and read the chapters in whatever order seems appropriate to you. These chapters are largely designed to stand alone. Some chapters may refer to other chapters, in which case you may want to read them in conjunction with one another.

Interspersed with the material are brief case studies. These will be in boxes, separate from the text. The purpose of these case studies is to provide real-world examples of how to use the tools. Additionally, near the beginning of each chapter, there will be a list of reasons to read that particular chapter and/or sample scenarios that set forth examples of the types of situations that would benefit from applying the tool(s) presented in that chapter. In this way, you will be able to quickly see which chapters will be most useful to you, depending on what challenges or situations you are facing at any given time.

We wrote this book together, utilizing Cami’s expertise as a performance coach, having spent many years coaching attorneys, and Steph’s experience as a practicing attorney—first as an associate in a law firm and then as a sole practitioner and later with an associate and staff. For clarity, we write in the first person plural, that is, “we.” When we wish to distinguish ourselves for purposes of sharing experiences, we specify who is speaking by writing either “Steph” or “Cami.” When you see this designation, you are reading a personal experience written by one of us.

This book is based on the following principle: commitment shows up in action. If you want to create change, you need to be committed to creating change. That means taking action. Simply put, if you want to create change you must take action. Many people believe they can create change by wishing for change and hoping for it and talking about it and
thinking about it. But change is only created by taking action. Throughout this book you will find ways not only to become self aware and discover where you are, but tools to use and actions to take to create the change you want. If you want to create change for yourself, take the action steps. Very little will change if you read this book and love everything in it and think about it and recommend it to all your friends, but take no action. Change will occur for you only if you act on what you have learned.

If you have decided to act upon what you learn here, congratulations and buy a notebook! Dedicate this notebook to your exploration of your life as an attorney. Use it to do the exercises in the book and to journal and reflect as you take this journey. Use it to make promises to yourself in order to take action and move forward.

Let’s get started. Our first tool is noticing “drift” and taking a stand. You will need to do this in order to make change in your practice. Noticing your drift and the drift of those you associate with is a fundamental starting point.

II. Taking a Stand

The Drift

*Cami:* I learned the concept of “the drift” from my mentor coach, Barbara Fagan.1 I met Barbara in a leadership program in 2007, in a hotel conference room in San Francisco. I remember her standing in the middle of a carpet that had a pattern that looked a bit like a river with stones throughout. “We all have a drift,” she said. And she elaborated, “We all have individual drifts, as well as collective drifts, such as family drifts, company drifts, and cultural drifts.”

“The drift” is the norm—what occurs when we are not acting consciously and purposefully. It acts like a river pulling us along. We are always in the drift, whether it is our individual drift or a collective drift. The only way to make change is to figuratively take a stand. This requires consciousness. As Barbara stood in the middle of the carpet-river, she demonstrated by stepping on to one of the “stones.”

“What is an example of someone who stood out of the drift?” she asked. I had just read Nelson Mandela’s autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom.* I offered him as an example, and she asked, “What was the drift he was dealing with?” After Mandela left prison, the black population in South Africa wanted him to run the country without his former oppressors. They wanted him to exclude the white South Africans from the government. Mandela made a values-based choice. His message was about inclusion. It always was—when he was fighting the government, when he was in prison, and continuing after his release. He

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1. Go to www.sourcepointtraining.com to learn about personal growth and coach trainings facilitated by Barbara and the phenomenal team of trainers at this company where I also received my coach training.
stayed in prison after he could have left as a stand for inclusion, and once blacks were in power, he remained a stand for inclusion. The way he rebuilt his country was to include all people, even those who had imprisoned him. This required him to take a powerful stand for inclusion against a strong “drift” on the part of his supporters for retribution.

Taking a stand requires courage and conviction and is a consciously-made choice that can have challenging ramifications. It is what I call a “values-based” decision. (See chapter 5 for a complete examination of values and how individuals and firms can learn and apply their values.)

Anthony works in a small busy firm specializing in insurance defense litigation. When he started at the firm, he quickly learned that whenever a meeting was called, no one showed up until at least ten minutes after the time the meeting was scheduled to start. Many participants did not arrive until close to twenty minutes after the meeting was scheduled to start. When Anthony first started at the firm, what struck him was that no one ever mentioned the lateness, and the latecomers—even those arriving well after the meetings had begun—did not apologize or even mention their tardiness.

The “drift” in Anthony’s firm is “we are all too busy to be on time; we are running as fast as we can; and we arrive as soon as we can.” This is based on a belief/attitude that “we are doing important work and the work takes a lot of time.”

Another interesting aspect of this community drift is that, since everyone is always late, there is no point in being on time. Anthony, normally a stickler for timeliness, noticed that he began to arrive late as well. As with any community drift, people begin to realize, consciously or not, that “I do not need to be on time because no one else will be.” The result is conformity. The antidote would be to take a stand, to speak up, to bring it to light and talk about it. Instead, the most we hear is grumbling and complaining and even the complainers don’t show up on time because it is “no use”. This is the conversation of the drift.

Why it is Useful to Know Your Drift

The drift in a group fosters mediocrity. What might be possible in Anthony’s firm if they began to examine their drift with regard to time and lateness?

The reason we believe you should know your personal drifts (and we all have several) is that they are detrimental to forward progress. They are also unconscious. Becoming conscious of them is the important first step. Being conscious of your drifts will allow you to notice when you are in them. Knowing when you are in them will allow you to take a stand when something is important to you and your drift is keeping you from getting it.

Cami: I tend to be a linear and analytic thinker. This can be a strength. But under
pressure, my drift is to over-analyze and over-think and take too much time making decisions. Now that I know this about myself, I can catch myself when it happens and ask myself, “Have I analyzed this enough?,” interrupting my tendency to overthink and choosing instead to act.

**Steph:** One of my drifts when I get under stress is to start talking loudly and quickly. In some situations, it causes people to pay attention to what I am saying. But it usually causes others to either stop listening or become anxious themselves. This gets in the way of my relationship with my clients, because when I am in this “drift,” they are afraid to tell me if they don’t understand what I’m saying. Often when I am in this drift, my clients do not feel like they can interrupt me. As a result, we do not always have clear communication. This drift therefore interferes with my ability to fully connect with my clients in a way that enables us both to be heard and understood by the other. I find it difficult to interrupt this drift, as it occurs when I am stressed and overwhelmed and thus not thinking very clearly. What helps is for me to stop talking, close my eyes, and take a deep breath. I find in that short moment, I am often able to quiet and slow my voice. In this way, I interrupt the drift so that I can hear my clients better, and I can speak in a way that they can better understand me.

**How Can You Recognize Your Drift?**

Because it is often easier to identify the group drift than your own, you may wish to begin by identifying the drifts of groups in which you are a member. If you belong to a group with a particular drift, you can be assured that you have it too, in one form or another. One way you can identify a group drift is by noticing the common non-working behaviors within the group.

**Glossary of Terms**

For purposes of this book, in order to look at results we generate, decisions we make, and our behaviors we employ, all without judgment, we will use the following terms:

- **Working:** a behavior, decision, or choice that produces an outcome you desire.
- **Non-Working:** a behavior, decision, or choice that produces an outcome you do not desire.

Note there is a Glossary at the back of this book with the coaching terms we use most often.

**Cami:** One of my clients shared that the drift in his firm was people did not take problems seriously. If he raised a serious issue, they would joke and laugh and walk away. The drift was to be dismissive of issues and act as if they did not matter. He realized this was getting in the way of their being able to discuss more serious firm issues and generate change.
I asked him, “How do you support this drift?” At first, he didn’t see it. Then he said, “I guess sometimes I joke with them too. And I may act in a way that makes them think I want to joke around rather than be serious.” He realized there is a time and a place for humor, and if he wanted others to take him seriously, he had to be more serious himself and take a stand out of the drift of turning everything into a joke. In this way, he discovered he had his own drift of using humor in challenging situations.

Mary

Mary is on the board of a non-profit. She notices that this group has a tendency to come up with good ideas during the meetings, but the group does not often follow through with their ideas. For example, when the group was planning a celebration for one of its departing members, and the topic was food, they discussed various alternatives, from having volunteers make food to paying a caterer, to certain places that might donate catering or provide it at cost. But when it came to actually calling the caterers, no one volunteered to do it, and the topic soon changed. Once the meeting ended, there was no action plan. Mary realized that she contributed to the drift in the group by not asking who would do the calling, or volunteering to do it herself. She also realized this occurs in her own life—that she very often has good ideas about her family, her practice, even herself, but fails to implement them. By observing the drift of the Board, she learned an important drift of herself that sometimes keeps her from accomplishing what she wants in her practice—talking about good ideas, but neglecting to follow through.

Chuck

Chuck is an officer of his local county bar association’s family-law section. The group regularly holds meetings in which family-law attorneys can mingle and discuss their practices. He has noticed that very often these meetings turn into gripe sessions about clients and about how awful it can be to practice family law. Sometimes the complaining gets on Chuck’s nerves, but very often he finds himself agreeing with what is said and adding to it by bringing up his own frustrations, often exaggerating to make his situation appear even worse than it is. Chuck notices this is a drift he has in other aspects of his life, often coming home complaining about traffic or the weather and making it seem worse than it really is. By looking at the drift of the bar association, he realized his drift is to complain rather than take action.
Patrick

Patrick has a wife and three kids. All five people love to talk and share their stories and experiences. Often, when one person is talking, the other four are either waiting for the speaker to be done so they can talk, or they are interrupting. With all five wanting to talk, it is rare that anyone listens. Patrick realizes that he is a part of this drift: while he is genuinely interested in his wife and kids, he is often only half-listening to them because he is waiting for his turn to talk. Patrick realizes he not only does this at home with his family, but with his friends, his clients, and opposing counsel. By noticing the drift in one environment, he learns about himself and sees that his drift carries over to other areas of his life—both personal and professional.

In all of our examples and case studies, the drifts—both collective and individual—result in non-working behaviors that lead to unwanted results. Anthony’s unwanted result is that he is often late to his appointments outside the office, when office meetings run over because people are not on time. Mary often does not act on good ideas, because she is waiting for someone else to take action. Chuck does not change many things, because his pattern is to complain instead. Patrick feels stressed around his family.

In order to make change, you must stand for what you want. If you say you want something to be different, but you do not take a stand for the change, the drift will carry you along, and nothing will change. This concept is the first chapter in this book because it is a fundamental precept to which we will refer throughout this book. We will suggest many places in which you can make change in order to have the practice you want and the life you want. In this book, we will offer you the opportunity to create awareness of yourself and your behaviors, and will offer you the tools to make changes. But you will need the courage and the commitment to make those changes. This will require you to honestly look at yourself and at your communities so you can take a stand and pull yourself out of the drift. As such, it is valuable now—as you are getting started—to recognize as many of your drifts as possible. As you move forward in this process and put new practices in place, you will discover even more of your personal drifts.

By definition, you are where you are due to a prevailing drift. Why is it that so many children are brilliant and resourceful but if they grow up in families that do not value education, they often will not use their brilliance to get an education and break out of the pattern? This is because the prevailing drift in their families is that education is not important; it is secondary to other things like working or having leisure time or taking care of family. In these families, those who do decide to stay in school and go to college and even graduate school must take a very strong stand because consciously or unconsciously the family will often be trying to pull them back into its drift. In fact, in such families, the one bucking the drift may be the butt of jokes or their families will consciously
or unconsciously put obstacles in their path toward an education. When you realize that where you are in life is largely due to the prevailing drift around you, you will also realize that you cannot make change comfortably—you must go against the flow.

Picture the drift as the flow of the current. Your group is in the river together, floating downstream with the current. This creates a level of comfort. If one person decides to make a change, it will create resistance (“waves” in the river). There is thus a tendency for the others to want to pull the person back in. And there is a tendency for that person to want to get back in and be surrounded by the others. This is why the collective drift can be so powerful: in order for change to be “comfortable,” everyone would have to make it at once. And this is highly unlikely. Change is uncomfortable. You may as well get used to it.

The General Community Drift of Lawyers
After surveying and interviewing many lawyers and making our own observations about lawyers and law firms, we have noted many recurring drifts. Below are examples of drifts that often prevail in law firms and for individual lawyers. Obviously, this is very general and does not apply to all lawyers or all firms. The prevailing drifts in many legal communities include the following:

- Practicing law is hard
- Practicing law takes a lot of time; you will never be caught up and certainly not ahead
- If you have any spare time, it should be filled with completing at least one more task
- If you have any spare time, you are not working hard enough
- Your own fulfillment is secondary to that of the client or the firm
- Stress—sometimes debilitating, I-can’t-cope-with-this stress—is just part of the job
- It’s OK to be late for meetings, depositions, anything but court
- Everything is urgent
- There isn’t enough time to explain fully to associates and staff what senior attorneys need
- There isn’t enough time to plan a strategy for a complex case
- If I am not nervous and worried, I am not doing a good job
- If I take a break from work to eat my lunch, I am wasting time and probably not committed to my job
- If my desk is clean and organized, I don’t have enough to do
- Working on the weekend is expected, a good thing, and shows you are committed to your job

What do you recognize in your firm? In yourself? Where does this drift get in your way? Where are you taking a stand? Where do you want to take a stand?
We will warn you now (and many times later) that making change in the legal community requires a strong stand.  

**Cami:** When I first began my coaching practice with attorneys, I had a phrase on my fliers that said, “practicing law doesn’t have to be hard.” And one of my former bosses said to me, “Yes it does. If you do it right, it is hard.” I have never heard a truer statement of the lawyer drift. It is a drift many of us are very committed to. If you are not open to the idea that practicing law can be fulfilling, that you could have time for other aspects of life, that you could remain connected to your family and have time for yourself, you should put this book down. Change requires a strong stand. As you change and bring change to your firm, you may encounter resistance. It’s just the drift, the status quo. Don’t let it stop you.

**Conclusion**

The reason most self-help books do not sustain lasting change is because they are considered a “good idea” but there is no “call to action.” In other words, there is no way to internalize and effectuate lasting change. One of the benefits of hiring a coach is having someone who will assist you in internalizing the concepts behind real change and applying them to your life and business in a way that creates lasting change. If you were to hire Cami as your coach, one thing she would do is *challenge you*. Throughout this book we will challenge you. Short of hiring a coach, the best way to internalize these concepts is to read this book and do the exercises. These exercises are designed to help you internalize the concepts by *using the concepts*. The best way to get maximum results from this book is to do more than simply read it. Use this book as your coach. Take each challenge that we lay down. Here is our first challenge to you—be committed and take this on in earnest. Some ideas are:

1. Buy a journal and do all of the exercises in this book;
2. Spend time regularly with the book and the exercises, perhaps at a certain time every day;
3. Bring these ideas into your firm;
4. Get a group of attorneys and work on the book together, creating an accountability system where each of you promises to make at least one change or try a new tool each week, and report back to the group. Accountability is one of the greatest benefits of hiring a coach. You can get this benefit in a group if you are committed to truly holding one another accountable in a rigorous manner. Sure, you can be compassionate, and you should, but do not let people slide! It does not serve them.

Start with the homework below and embark on the journey!
Homework

1. What is your firm drift? How do you know? In order to discover, ask yourself the following questions and journal the answers:
   a. What is not working in this system?
   b. What bothers me most about this group of people?
   c. What bad habits do we all share?
   d. When we take on a project together what typically gets in our way/slow us down?

2. What is your family drift? How do you know?
   a. What is not working in this system?
   b. What bothers me most about how we are in our family?
   c. What bad habits do we all share?
   d. When we take on a project together what typically gets in our way/slow us down?

3. What are your own personal drifts?
   Hint: Look at the previous two questions for ideas. Keep a list of your personal drifts on a few pages in your journal. Add to this list as you discover more. This is not an exercise in beating yourself up. It is an exercise in creating awareness. Be kind to yourself and be curious about yourself. In the chapter on accountability we discuss the concept of neutrality. You may want to read that now. Neutrality is very important when asking yourself what traits you possess that sabotage you.

4. Talk to someone in one or more of your groups about “drift.”
   Teach them the concept (if you can teach it, you will also learn it). Ask them what they see as the prevailing drifts in this group. Ask yourself if this is also your personal drift. If so, add it to your list.