Introduction

From Cami

Earlier this year, I spoke to a class at my alma mater—McGeorge School of Law, in Sacramento, California. I was speaking to an evening class, taught by adjunct professors—prominent attorneys in Sacramento, one of whom was a sole practitioner; the other had spent his career in a large firm. The class was called “The Business of Lawyering” and its purpose was to teach attorneys how to open and run a successful law practice. I spoke that night on Communication Skills and Trust-Building Skills for attorneys. These are skills you will find within the pages of this book. These are skills I teach at law firms and bar associations throughout the state of California. When I graduated from McGeorge in 1991, no such class was offered.

As I walked out of the class with the professors, one of them said to me, “Law schools make lawyers. They don’t make anything else. And that’s a problem.”

The truth is that when you leave law school, you are only prepared to research, write, and argue. You are only prepared to practice law. You aren’t prepared to open your own office. You aren’t prepared for the conflict that comes with litigation. You aren’t prepared for the long hours expected of you as an associate. Tools not taught in law school include communication skills, interpersonal skills, trust-building with clients and other counsel, time management skills, stress management, and life-balance skills. Yet to be successful in this high-stress line of work, all of these skills are necessary.

When I left law school in 1991, I had a hard time finding a job. In Sacramento at that time, there was an abundance of attorneys looking for work. To make ends meet while I was job hunting, I took on independent contract work. As weeks turned to months and I paid my bills through contracting with other attorneys and law firms to provide research and writing, I came to find that I had a freedom not experienced by my colleagues who were working as associates for law firms. Eventually, I stopped looking for a “real job,” and I continued working as a contract attorney. I built a successful business working for other attorneys in small and mid-sized firms. I continued in this business for sixteen years. At times, my contract was to work for several weeks in a law office out of town. I quickly realized that was not for me. Many times, my contract included preparing for, and participating in, trial or arbitration, which meant that I worked very long days. I really enjoyed this work, but when trial ended, I realized each time, I would not want to do this work full time. By paying attention to how I felt and how much I valued freedom and down
time, I invented a job that worked very well for me. I kept steady hours, working from home, Starbucks, or the law library.

When, after sixteen years, I became trained as a business coach, I decided I would like to coach attorneys. The main reason I made this choice was from my experience practicing with colleagues who were unhappy, burned out, and overworked. I realized that I had created a way to practice law that worked for me. I always had time for myself and my family. Thus I realized, “practicing law does not have to be hard.” And I came to develop my theory of accountability in the practice of law—we each get to decide how hard we want to work and how many hours we want to put in. If you don’t like what you are doing, do something else. There are many more ways to approach your practice than you ever could imagine.

And so my goal in coaching attorneys, and in writing this book, has been to bring tools, ideas and skills to attorneys to assist them in practicing in their own way—the way that is most fulfilling for each individual attorney. For in the end, when we feel good about what we are doing, our work is better, our health is better, and our family life is better. A happy, satisfied, fulfilled attorney is simply a better attorney.

But remember this—a tool is just a tool. You might buy a computer to draft documents. But if you don’t learn how to use the computer—and actually use it—nothing will get drafted. The same is true with this book. It is full of tools. The way you use them involves opening your mind to a different way and putting the tools in practice. So open the box and read the instructions—learn to use the computer.

Capture your success,
Cami

From Stephanie

When Cami approached me and said she wanted to write a book about coaching for attorneys, and she asked for my help, I was excited. I always wanted to be a writer, but then decided to channel those energies into law-and-motion work and appellate briefs. So being part of an actual book intrigued me.

What was especially compelling about this book, and why I was able to make an effective contribution, is that it addresses a subject more attorneys need to embrace to enhance their practices: coaching. Coaching has greatly improved my practice and my life. I personally have employed several different coaches during my career, and I have seen first-hand the positive changes I have been able to make. Through coaching, I have been able to reach new and different levels in my practice. Coaching has helped me add balance to my life and efficiency and effectiveness to my practice.

My part in this has been to provide real-life examples based on my experience in practicing law and interacting with many different attorneys over my almost twenty-year legal career. What I have seen in the legal profession during that time is that most lawyers are
harried, stressed-out, and overwhelmed. There is always too much to do and not enough time to do it. Many of us feel like hamsters in a wheel, running as fast as we can and never getting anywhere. For litigators (like me), the entire job is marked by conflict: conflict with the courts, opposing counsel, and often even our own clients. Lawyering is one of the few professions in which conflict is not only the norm, but often the goal. I see people whose desire to “win” exacts a great toll on their personal lives and their health. And yet the vast majority of attorneys I know and meet are good, hard-working people who strive to make a difference, and who went into the profession with the desire to help people. I saw this book as a way to help them. And it helped me in the process.

I am proud to have been a part of this book. The teachings are invaluable. Putting them to use is the key. There will always be unreasonable opposing counsel, over-demanding clients, and judges who just don’t seem to “get it.” But by reading this book and implementing the practices herein, you are taking a huge step toward taking control of your life, your practice, and your part in our honorable profession.

Enjoy,
Stephanie