CHOOSING AND PURSUING ALTERNATIVE CAREERS

Presented by the American Bar Association Membership & Marketing Division, ABA Career Center and Center for Professional Development
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Choosing and Pursuing Alternative Careers

November 14, 2014 | 1:00 PM Eastern

Faculty Bios

Carroll Welch practiced commercial litigation and employment law before working with Pace Law School’s re-entry program, New Directions for Attorneys. She founded Carroll Welch Consulting, based in NYC, to coach and counsel lawyers. Carroll is a certified coach and received her BA from Johns Hopkins and her JD, in 1989, from the University of Virginia School of Law.

Casey Berman graduated in 1999 from the University of California, Hastings School of Law, after receiving his BA from the University of California at Berkeley. He practiced law for several years before moving to business and finance endeavors. Casey continued his entrepreneurship, founding Leave Law Behind, when he noticed while speaking at his alma mater all the interest fellow lawyers have in alternative careers.
Moderator Bio

Kathy Morris is the moderator of the American Bar Association’s monthly Career Advice Series. A former criminal defense attorney, she has taught law, pioneered professional development initiatives in law firms, and in 2000, launched the original Career Resource Center of the ABA. She counsels law students, lawyers, law schools, and law firms through her longstanding practice Under Advisement, Ltd., www.underadvisement.com.

She received her JD from Northeastern in Boston in 1975 and her BA in 1971 from the University of Michigan.

Program Agenda

- Top Issues
- Tips on the Topic
- Participant Questions
- Agree/Disagree
- More Participant Questions
- Takeaways
- ABA Resources
Top Issues

• How to begin choosing an alternative career
• Where to begin pursuing non-traditional roles
• Steps along the way and obstacles to overcome

Tips on the Topic

• Explore your unique genius
• Utilize your research skills
• Be open to all possibilities
• Let the jobs come to you
Questions?

Feeling desperate can help people take the leap away from law.
Agree/Disagree

People want to help.

More Participant Questions?

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Takeaways

• Give yourself some time
• Decide what is non-negotiable for you
• Manage your search as you’d manage a project
• Be sure to pay it forward

Alternative Careers
Visit the ABA Career Center Website to:

• **Search and apply** for more than 450 high-quality legal jobs nationwide
• **Upload your resume** for review by hundreds of potential employers
• **Receive email alerts** when new jobs are posted that meet your search criteria
• Or **post a job** if you have an open position to fill

www.ambar.org/careers

Visit **www.ambar.org/advice** to register for our next Free Career Advice Series Program:

**Volunteering to Enhance Your Career**

**December 12, 2014**
1:00 to 2:00 PM ET

www.ambar.org/advice
Seven Skills Attorneys Have That the Rest of the World Would Die For
By CASEY BERMAN

Some of us lawyers want to leave the law: We are unhappy and dissatisfied with our work situation. We suffer long hours. We find our day-to-day lawyer tasks mostly uninteresting. We are demotivated because we are not included in the partner track discussions. We feel we receive little-to-no mentoring. We are weighed down by high student loans.

And maybe most important, we feel that our professional skill set is not really in alignment with the duties and responsibilities required to be a lawyer. We are not fully confident that we can be a real good lawyer. It’s turning out that what we are good at doing and what we enjoy doing isn’t what an attorney does. We’re pretty sure that this lawyer gig is really not for us.

But we don’t leave the law because we have sincere doubts that any of our legal job skills are transferrable to any non-legal jobs. We find it unrealistic that someone outside of a law firm would even consider hiring a lawyer like us. We don’t believe that we have any marketable skills that a non-legal business would want.

But we do. We lawyers who want to leave the law possess a skill set and an array of talents that are actually in high demand by many businesses. Let’s see how.

**Client Management:** In a business, any business, whether it sells a product or provides a service, there are people it sells to or works closely with that need to be managed and attended to (call them customers or clients or partners or stakeholders or shareholders or advisors or any number of other descriptive terms). These real, live, human customers need to be understood, coddled, directed, serviced, upsold, excited and reigned in.

Working with clients is something we lawyers do day-in and day-out. A lawyer’s ability to listen, issue spot and relate with these real, live, human people is a skill that not everyone has. This skill is essential to a company’s relationship building, reputation growth, client retention and customer support.

**Upselling:** If a business provides value to its customers, the customers will naturally come back for more. But oftentimes, businesses need to proactively suggest and highlight potential products and services and future projects to their captive customer base. This of course helps the business grow its revenue, and also provides a valuable service to a customer by (sincerely) suggesting other products and services to which the customer can avail him or herself.

Whether we realize it or not, we attorneys are always upselling. Attorneys with close client contact will often suggest other courses of action, other defenses to approach, other research and analysis angles, other agreements to put in place, other services to consider, other advisors to contact. Upselling new ideas is
instinctual for us … and can be an extremely valuable skill set for every business and appreciated by its customers.

**Issue Spotting:** Believe it or not, the “I” in IRAC could be our ticket to a new gig. In business, there are always issues, messes, projects, and things to figure out. Something always goes wrong, and a solution to fix it needs to be hatched. Or something goes phenomenally right and this new opportunity presents a multitude of new options. As such, decisions need to be made, strategies need to be devised, communications need to be delivered, next steps need to be agreed upon, and teams need to be created to execute.

This is what we do daily. Who better than an attorney to jump up to that white board in the conference room, assess the mess of options and gradually moderate all of the executives to spot the issues that affect the business most, objectively prioritize actions, and then calmly delegate to the most responsible employees? We don’t need to necessarily make the final call; we just need to create the environment for the executive team to calmly make informed, thorough, and educated decisions on what to do next. We issue spot for a living for our clients … we can do the same for businesses out there.

**Clear and Concise Prose:** Attorneys write. A lot. And we write well. We write clearly, precisely and in a thoughtful, informative manner.

And so much of business nowadays is also about writing: People from all types of companies write stuff … emails, PowerPoints, proposals, reviews, reports, bios, pitch books, social media content, marketing content.

And it’s a sad fact, but across many businesses, so much of this content is not written well: It’s unclear, not spaced correctly, un-relatable, grammatically incorrect or just plain indecipherable. People go back and forth trying to understand each other or send multiple versions trying to come to a final result. Time is wasted, important issues are misunderstood, frustration grows, productivity is reduced.

Our writing style can help. We can craft explanatory emails. We can draw up informative presentations. We can put together persuasive pitches. And we can do all of this in less time and with less confusion than many non-lawyers can. We’ve already been trained to write understandable, persuasive content for discerning readers (judges, opposing counsel, clients). In the current Information and Content Age, this is a skill any business would love to get its hands on.

**Interpersonal Skills:** Even with telecommuting, virtual offices and the internet, business is won and lost and grows and retracts based on personal relationships. People do business with whom they trust, with whom they find commonality and with whom they like. And these relationships are built on clear communication, exchanges of ideas and getting to know each other.

While not all lawyers would rank interpersonal skills as their top strength, many do. We rain make new business, we build relationships with opposing counsel, we get to know judges and staff, we become trusted advisors to companies and organizations. All of these relationship skills are also in heavy demand by businesses, who need interactive people to build strong personal relationships and lead important strategic initiatives.
**Dependable, Disciplined and Loyal:** In addition to people they can trust and like, business owners need workers they can depend on. Things need to get done, fires need to be put out, projects need to be kick started. The person that just gets stuff done on time, even if it’s not perfect, is of immense value.

We lawyers are solid people. We can be counted on. We meet deadlines. We are used to keeping confidentiality, professional ethics, and fiduciary duties. In short, we have been regulated our whole lives and while this may wear on us or the responsibility may even cause us anxiety as practicing lawyers, it has distilled in us a distinct sense of responsibility and duty that is indispensable for businesses looking for solid people to hire.

**Working Long Hours:** People in business put in a lot of hard work. Nowadays, with the 24/7 cycle, it seems like everyone is always working.

And we of course work hard too. Attorneys work into the evenings throughout the work week. We come into the office around noon on Sundays. We work around the clock when the deal or the trial requires it. Going the extra mile (and miles after that) is expected in our day-to-day as a lawyer.

Of course, these long hours are a major driver for many wanting to leave the law. But in the non-legal business world, where people work hard but where “normal lawyer” hours are definitely not the norm, we will by default often be the hardest worker in the room. This means that we can achieve some of the reduced hour lifestyle we so desperately want, while also contributing mightily to our company and its mission.

So keep this in mind – what we lawyers do day to day is not solely reserved for the practice of the law. There is a wide world out there of other, non-legal roles that may be a fit with our skill set and strengths.

*Casey Berman (University of California, Hastings '99), head of strategy for a San Francisco based technology company, investment banker and former in-house counsel, is also the founder of Leave Law Behind, a blog and community that focuses on helping unhappy attorneys leave the law.*
Nine Non-Legal Jobs You Can (Really, Truly) Do With a Law Degree
By CASEY BERMANN

Many of us unhappy attorneys are tired, exhausted and frustrated with the practice of law. We are confused as to how, after all of the work we did in law school, all of the loans we took out, all of the hard work we did as an associate attorney, we now sit 3, 5, 8, 12 or more years in and wonder “I’m not happy. How did this happen?”

So, we decide, yes, we want to leave the law behind and do something else. We want to find another job that pays well, that provides us with meaning and self-worth. And we are encouraged by that oft repeated advice “You can do anything with a law degree.”

And so we begin to think of other things to do, anything. But soon, this optimistic phrase that is supposed to encourage us can actually begin to stress us out. First, it’s human nature, that if we have too many choices, it can be difficult to choose just one. We waffle, we are indecisive, and so instead of relishing the vast opportunity of choices a law degree and legal training put at our disposal, we often times become paralyzed by these potential choices. And we don’t choose any. And so we keep practicing law. And we remain unhappy.

Second, when we ask anyone what actual jobs you can do with a law degree, the answers are either too broad (Politics! Banking! Entrepreneurism!), require too much additional training and school (Become a doctor! Become a chemist!) or oftentimes, for people with ambition, student loan debt, and family bills to pay, are just straight-up unrealistic (Become a park ranger! Become a high school history teacher!).

What we lawyers who want to leave the law need is a realistic assessment of certain jobs that are non-legal, can utilize some or most of a lawyer’s general skill set (issue spotting, public speaking, analytical skills, client management, risk management, informative and engaging writing, and distilling complicated ideas into an easy-to-understand summary) and exist in roughly the same geographical and personal network that we lawyers have now.

I attempt to provide this below.

Now before we dive in, of course, to get these jobs there is a lot of difficult and time intensive work that needs to be done. We need to gain a better understanding of our strengths, our confidences and our enjoyments (our “Unique Genius”), and try to find a role that involves this skill set and that we’d enjoy and be good at. We need to reposition our legal resume into one that aligns with this non-legal job. We need to get out there and network and meet and get coffees with people in these fields to (i) research which roles we may actually enjoy and (ii) gain warm leads into companies in order to increase our chances of being considered. It’s a lot of hard work, but it’s very do-able work.
So without further ado, here are nine (mainly corporate) jobs that are very well aligned with a lawyer’s skills:

**HR Director/Manager:** An HR Manager maintains and enhances a company’s human resources by planning, implementing, and evaluating employee relations and human resources policies, programs, and practices. It involves assessing new hires and employees and being able to read people. It requires organizational skills, meeting deadlines, and fine attention to detail. HR Professionals must ensure the company’s legal compliance by implementing federal and state requirements and even representing the company at hearings.

This role is very well suited for an employment or labor attorney with good people skills and a certain level of empathy.

**Chief Operating Officer:** The great thing about being in Operations is it touches all aspects of the business. The COO (and often times the VP of Operations) influence everything from strategy to sales to HR to finance and legal. More specifically, the COO ensures that a business has the proper operational controls, administrative & reporting procedures, and people systems in place to effectively grow the organization and to ensure financial strength and operating efficiency. The COO assesses important metrics, oversees and maintains the organization’s infrastructure and serves as an overall glue for the company.

This role is ideal for an experienced attorney who is a natural leader, really enjoys affecting various levels and departments in an organization and has hands on experience counseling company executives in the past.

**Internal Recruiter:** A recruiter is focused on meeting a company’s staffing objectives by recruiting and evaluating job candidates and advising hiring managers on courses of actions to take. Recruiters establish a company’s recruiting requirements, create and maintain applicant source channels, “herd the cats”, manage all logistics of the hiring process and understand all legal and compliance requirements.

This is a great job for the lawyer who likes to put deals together, attend and lead recruiting events, has a good understanding of people and employment law and likes to interact with many different departments.

**Chief Financial Officer:** CFO may seem like a strange job for many lawyers who may have been liberal arts majors in college, but the CFO position can actually be in alignment with a lot of a lawyer’s skills. You don’t need to be a number cruncher to be a CFO (that’s what Bookkeepers and Controllers are for). In companies big and small, the CFO is a true partner to the CEO and other executives. The CFO’s main mandate is to develop and maintain the financial well-being of the company. The CFO’s team provides financial projections and accounting services to enable the company to make informed and strategic decisions moving forward. And in smaller companies, the CFO oversees many administrative functions, like Legal, HR and Administration.

This role is perfect for a lawyer who considers himself a “care taker” type, prides him or herself on attention to detail, conservative financial wherewithal, and a broad and strategic view on business.

**Vice President of Business Development:** This job can be a great fit for many attorneys, and is very important role in a company. The main job of the VP of Biz Dev is to build a company’s market position
by identifying, developing, defining, negotiating, and closing business deals, relationships, partnerships and opportunities. It’s like sales, but even more strategic and aligns with a company’s long term objectives. This job is proactive – it involves creating opportunities and accepting ownership of growing the company’s business. It also optimizes much of one’s legal skill set – it requires managing complex contract negotiations and working with the company’s legal counsel.

This is a great role for a corporate, M&A or licensing attorney who likes to do deals, interact and grow relationships with people, be the face of an organization and contribute and execute on a company’s short and long term strategy.

**Vice President/Director of Corporate Development:** Like the VP of Business Development, the VP (or Director) of Corporate Development role involves both proactive deal making and legal awareness and contract negotiations. As corporate development professionals are often high level executives, this work focuses on leading the development of company’s growth though mergers, acquisitions or company reorganizations.

The main goal of this role is to fuel overall corporate growth, and would be great for that attorney who loves to deals, has real good interpersonal skills, the ability to ramp up quickly on the dynamics of certain industries and has experience in advising clients in M&A.

**Project Management:** A project manager accomplishes a project’s objectives by planning, evaluating and shepherding the project’s activities. The project manager owns and is accountable for the project at hand, from beginning to end - he or she manages the staffing, the timeline, the budget, the unexpected and the delivery. This role manages the relationship between the team members and the stakeholders at large. The project can be in tech, consumer goods, research, engineering, professional services … really anything that requires getting from point A to point B.

This a great role for attorneys who enjoy mentoring staff, have leadership capabilities, are very interested in or like to geek out on certain types of product or industries, like digging deep into a task at hand and enjoy the pressure and reward of being accountable.

**Content Writer:** While not usually a senior position, a Content Writer’s role is generally focused on writing engaging content for a company across any number of channels to market and promote the company’s brand and mission. This can include blog posts, news articles, product page content, compliance documents, internal technical documents, social media posts, comments, emails, and presentations. And from time to time this role may also include editing and proof-reading documents and proposals. The role may require some marketing savvy and also necessitate one to be editorially and commercially minded.

This role can be a great fit for a younger attorney who loves to write (and is dying to write more than briefs, memos or other legal docs!), pays attention to detail, can meet deadlines, enjoys marketing and branding and has great research skills.

**Corporate Trainer:** Corporate trainers work in companies to teach skills and knowledge to employees. This might involve training new employees, teaching new skills or business systems to existing employees or helping with transitioning during a corporate merger or more. Corporate trainers are really just teachers and must be able to speak in front of a crowd, produce and understand training materials,
work closely with individuals and evaluate how well employees have learned. They must critically choose which programs and materials are best for the subject being taught, must have great public speaking skills and must be able to motivate and manage training staff and budget.

This is a great role for a litigator who is sick of the adversarial nature of law, loves people and would rather collaborate, teach, inform and “perform” with others.

While in truth it may be unrealistic to say that you can do anything with a law degree, there really are concrete, real life, non-legal jobs out there the responsibilities of which would benefit hugely from one’s legal skill set and can provide the career path, financial incentive and professional satisfaction in alignment with an unhappy lawyer’s personal and professional goals.

Casey Berman (University of California, Hastings ’99), a current chief strategy officer, investment banker and former in-house counsel based in San Francisco, is also the founder of Leave Law Behind, a blog and community that focuses on helping unhappy attorneys leave the law.
The Impact of a Strong Narrative in Your Alternative Career Transition
By CARROLL WELCH

Planning a transition to an alternative career as a lawyer can be an exciting time, filled with promise and possibility. If you’re not sure exactly where you’re heading, a shift to a new role inside, outside or around the law is a process of experimentation and exploration. You’ll need to talk with a lot of people to make the change happen: people in your target industry; those who have the kind of job that you want to have; those who can hire for those jobs or help you in some way; or those who simply know you and can provide perspective or much needed support during the process. Having a thoughtful narrative can have a tremendous impact, both in advancing your progress and in helping you to gain greater clarity on the target of your alternative career search.

What is a narrative?
A narrative is your career story, told as a form of connected events that have lead you to this transition. It emphasizes the themes that connect your past experiences, skills and knowledge to the present, and connects them to why you are now exploring an alternative career in marketing, energy, health care or wherever you happen to be looking, for the future. To illustrate, consider the narrative told by Lucy, a large firm senior associate practicing IP litigation. Lucy spent 10 months researching a transition that ultimately led to her an alternative career as a Diversity Initiatives Director in the career services department of a law school. As Lucy progressed through the transition that led to her current role, she spoke to numerous contacts in law school administration, legal recruiting and human resources. By the time Lucy got close to her targeted role, she’d had 17 conversations with various contacts. Some were brief phone chats; some were coffee dates; and others were full informational interviews. As she came close to identifying the alternative career that she wanted, Lucy was highlighting the following elements of her background in her narrative:

- undergraduate major in psychology with a concentration in social and organizational psychology
- serving as president of her college’s Latino Students’ Union
- experience as both a first generation college student and a member of an underrepresented minority
- as a law student, organized several panel programs featuring alumni in different practice areas
- membership in her state bar association’s Diversity in the Profession Committee
- participation in structured mentoring programs and in recruitment at her law firm
- writing a published article for NALP on a diversity-related topic
excellent skills (that she enjoyed using as a practicing attorney) of communication, writing, and counseling clients

Told as part of a cohesive narrative, the elements above became part of a thread or theme that made Lucy a plausible and compelling candidate for the role that she ultimately landed. In each telling, to the elements listed above, she added descriptive words that colored her narrative with energy, enthusiasm, positivity and confidence.

How Does A Narrative Help?
When Lucy started her transition into her alternative career, she wasn’t sure where she was heading. She just knew that she wanted a change after having thought about it for a long time but done nothing. As she told and re-told her story, she became more committed. “Something about hearing myself tell my story made it more real. It wasn’t just a crazy idea that I kept to myself anymore. Having to tell the story propelled me forward.” As a (somewhat) public declaration of your intention to change, a narrative can help you to feel more invested in the change process.

The first few times that Lucy told her story, it was clumsy and didn’t include all the elements listed above. Conversations with different people informed and shaped its development. In between conversations, she reflected on how her narrative needed to improve. She received feedback about what to highlight. She learned what wasn’t important or compelling. After her conversation with an attorney who is (now) her counterpart as a diversity and inclusion director at another law school, for example, she incorporated the element about her experience of planning career development programs as a law student into her narrative. “He mentioned in our conversation that he had planned a lot of programs for the law school, so I thought it was important to include that.”

Lucy was not prepared to start interviewing for a role as a law school diversity and inclusion director immediately after honing in on this as her targeted alternative career. When she was finally ready, though, she’d had months of practice telling her narrative. It was nuanced and well developed. In interviews for her current role, she added more information to her narrative about the value that she could add with her skills and knowledge. Her transition was successful and her story continues.

Conclusion
As a story that brings together your personal and professional experiences into a cohesive whole, your narrative can set you apart from other networking contacts or employment candidates. After all, no one’s story is identical to yours, and your uniqueness can be your greatest asset in your career transition process.

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Recommended Print Resources for Choosing and Pursuing an Alternative Career

*Alternative Careers for Lawyers* by Hilary Mantis (The Princeton Review)

*The Creative Lawyer* (2nd edition) by Michael Melcher (American Bar Association)

*From Lemons to Lemonade in the New Legal Job Market* by Richard L. Hermann (LawyerAvenue Press/Decision Books)

*Life After Law: Finding Work You Love With the JD You Have* by Liz Brown (Bibliomotion)

*The New What Can You Do With a Law Degree?* by Dr. Larry Richard and Tanya Hanson (LawyerAvenue Press/Decision Books)

*Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers* by Gary A. Munneke, et. al. (American Bar Association)

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