

Pink slip blues

What to do if the recession costs you your job.



Across the country, young lawyers are fearful there's a pink slip in their future, as law firms downsize in the face of a global recession. The chopping block has already seen action south of the border. At press time, the "Layoff List" at AmericanLawyer.com listed at least 50 major U.S. and international firms that have laid off lawyers since last spring. In Canada, Fraser Milner Casgrain LLP had become the first large firm to follow suit, with reports that it was cutting 10 associates and 25 staff, while rumors of more pending layoffs ran rampant on the Canadian legal scene.

How do you improve your chances of making the cut? "Stabilize your position," advises Allison Wolf, a lawyer coach with Shift Works Strategic Business Coaching in Vancouver. Be a keener, raise your hand, volunteer, write and present in your area of interest. Ask for feedback, and act on it. Take a partner to lunch and build your external network.

"Work really hard to integrate into your firm, so you have a fan base," says Karen MacKay of Phoenix Legal, a Toronto-based management consulting firm that works with law firms to support lawyers who have been let go. "If you stay in your office and don't reach out for work and deliver quality, you are at risk."

Should a pink slip land on your desk, follow these tips from the pros:

- Take time to grieve and feel sorry for yourself — but not too long. Shake yourself up and start calling your mentors for advice.
- Negotiate a termination package. "Put those lawyering skills to work in your favour," advises Wolf.
- Nurture your network — 85% of jobs are found through networking.
- Engage a professional coach for one or two sessions.

- Evaluate your strengths and goals. Act not out of desperation, but based on good strategic analysis.
- Consider a move to a smaller community where, even during economic downturns, law firms are looking for skilled lawyers and future partners.
- Consider legal work outside of private practice — NGOs, legal departments, legal publishers, etc. If it's not a fit, you can return to private practice after the recession with valuable experience under your belt.
- Volunteer, travel or return to school for an LL.B. MacKay recalls a client who, after losing his job, went to Thailand to help build a school destroyed by the tsunami. "There's not a law firm in the city that will hold it against you that you took that year off."

— Amy Jo Ehman

That thing you do

When someone asks me for career advice (and I've been known to volunteer this advice, even unasked!), I say, "Do what you do. What do you do already, in your free time? Try to do that as your job."

In my case, although as a U.S. Supreme Court clerk, I surely had one of the most fascinating jobs for a lawyer, on the weekends I was writing a book. This was a helpful

clue as to a profession I might enjoy. I have a friend who always felt guilty in law school because he was wasting so much time playing video games. After graduation, he gave up a prestigious clerkship to work for — you guessed it — a video game company.

It can be hard to identify your "passion," but you can identify what you did last Sunday afternoon. "Do what you do" is useful because it directs you to look at your

behaviour, rather than to your ideas, which can be a clearer guide to preferences. It's not possible for everyone, but to have work that is play, and play that is work, is a very, very happy state.

Gretchen Rubin is an author and former U.S. Supreme Court law clerk currently working on a new book, *The Happiness Project*. This article is excerpted from her blog at http://www.happiness-project.com/happiness_project/2008/10/why-it-might-no.html

Is the grass really greener?

Lawyers try moving in-house from a law firm — and vice versa.

After three decades of law firm life, most recently as a partner with Bennett Jones LLP, real estate specialist Terry Livermore realized that the only aspect of his practice that had changed over the past 20 years was an extra zero in the contracts he handled.

“It really got to be rather mundane and the same old, same old,” he recalls. So when a position came up at Calgary-based Walton International Group, a real estate asset management firm, he jumped on the opportunity and hasn’t looked back. “It’s such a variety of work,” he says. “It was really nice to learn something new, exercise the grey matter a little bit.”

Livermore wasn’t deterred by the false stereotypes that in-house work is second-tier. He knew many high-achieving lawyers who had made the switch, including his current boss Adelle Fruman — “probably the smartest person I’ve ever dealt with” — who served as an Alberta Court of Appeal judge before heading up the nine-person legal department at Walton International. “It’s not just somewhere to go and retire,” he says.

But not everyone who makes the leap in-house ends up quite as happy with the experience. When a real estate opportunity arose at CIBC, Jane Chung

didn’t want to pass it up. After all, everybody she knew seemed to be fantasizing about going in-house, and the prospect of manageable hours held a lot of appeal for a junior associate dealing with the demands and long hours of law firm life.

After a couple of years, however, she found she was just “scratching the surface” in the variety of legal work she performed for the bank’s mortgage division. “I got to learn about the business — that’s something that you really can’t get in private practice,” she says. “It gave me a broad-based knowledge of other areas of law, especially the regulatory aspect. But at the end of the day, once you got a handle on that, that’s pretty much it.”

Now an associate at Miller Thomson LLP, she relishes the opportunity to specialize and delve into complex issues. “I’ve had a lot of people ask me, ‘Are you crazy? Why are you moving back to private practice?’” Chung says. But she has no regrets. “I’m very happy where I’m at,” she emphasizes. “It was more in line with what my career goals are.”



Terry Livermore



Jane Chung

By **Julie Stauffer**. Excerpted from an article in the Fall 2008 issue of *CCCA Magazine* (http://ccca.dgtlpub.com/2008/2008-10-31/pdf/where_the_grass_is_greener.pdf).

New beginnings

If you make the decision to strike out on your own, be prepared. It takes five years to get any new business — including a new law practice — off the ground and be stable enough to continue. These are issues that any lawyer looking to start a new firm should keep in mind.

Finances. Managing money is your number one consideration for success in a new firm. Practice needs should always be met first, and personal needs should be the minimum expense necessary to maintain a standard of living. One essential is that your new law firm should not be a bank for clients.

Infrastructure. Bricks and mortar, computers and software are essential to the new firm, but choices should reflect practical analysis. Office space, for example, will tell clients and lawyers about what kind of firm you are. Lower real estate costs exemplify a firm sensitive to client needs (since lower overhead could translate into a lower fee structure). Yet the office must portray the image your clients expect of you.

Marketing. Develop a profile of your ideal client and craft a marketing strategy that focuses on this target, not everyone. You can increase your revenue dramatically by

By **Ed Poll** (edpoll@lawbiz.com), a certified management consultant and coach in Los Angeles who coaches lawyers and law firms on how to deliver their services more profitably. Read the full article at www.cba.org/practicelink/careerchange.

• Alumni allies

Long before the day comes to retire from your current organization, the transitioning planning should begin — ideally, five to ten years in advance. An important ingredient, whether one is planning to “retire” in the traditional sense or go on to another career, job or personal pursuit, is joining and becoming increasingly active in alumni networks.

Many businesses now have alumni groups for personnel of all ages who have left for various reasons: other opportunities, to join a client, career change, relocation move, retirement, etc. These alumni groups may have periodic meetings or social events, a directory, an online social network and other means to facilitate connections and stay in touch with each other and the organization.

College and graduate school alumni networks also are valuable for maintaining connections. They can facilitate business connections with younger alums who may be starting businesses and need the maturity, judgment and expertise of seasoned professionals and executives.

Remember: the best way to get value when you need it from networks is to build relationships before you need them. Plan ahead for later transitions through earlier involvement and relationship-building.

By **Phyllis Weiss Haserot**, a business development and organizational effectiveness expert and founder of Practice Development Counsel. Excerpted from a blog post at <http://www.nextgeneration-nextdestination.com/2008/08/add-to-transiti.html>.

• Giving it up

There are five major reasons unhappy lawyers give for feeling trapped in the practice of law:

1. “Maybe I need to give this law thing one more chance.”
2. “I wish I had a trust fund, but I don’t.”
3. “I can’t put my finger on exactly what I want to do next.”
4. “It’s easy to get stuck in a rut.”
5. “I know I need to do something, but I just don’t have the time.”

By **Monica Parker**, career coach, at <http://www.leavingthelaw.com/blog/2008/04/5-reasons-unhappy-lawyers-get-stuck-in.html>

focusing on clients who will give you the work that you want. New law firms build loyalty by communicating frequently, offering something that competitor firms don’t or can’t, and creating something new that clients need or want. Providing solutions gets attention — and gets rewarded.