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Navigating a Career Crossroads

It's not uncommon for people to reach a crossroad in their careers. Sometimes they arrive at this point as a result of an unexpected job loss. In other cases, professionals may simply feel that their job is not offering them the challenge or rewards they seek. Both of these scenarios are likely to occur in today's legal environment.

Even experienced administrators may find themselves without a job through no fault of their own. Those who remain employed may feel that their positions have become less satisfying – yet more stressful – because their firms are in a retrenchment mode. It's not easy to grow in new directions, after all, if your firm is cutting back on staff and unnecessary expenditures. But you may feel a strong need to find greater professional fulfillment.

When you're faced with a career crossroads, determining how to correct your course is always difficult. In today's uncertain economy, you may be particularly concerned about the consequences of any actions you might take. However, by carefully evaluating your situation and determining what's working, what's not and why, you can make choices that are beneficial for your career.

What Motivates You?

Start by examining the most satisfying aspects of your current job – or your last position if you've been laid off. Which responsibilities or accomplishments provided the most satisfaction? For instance, did you prefer training and mentoring employees or working independently on analytical tasks.

You may find it helpful to envision your dream job. Consider all aspects of the position: the work environment, the level of responsibility, how many employees you'd oversee, as well as any other issues that are important to you. Assuming you're still employed, is this dream job opportunity available at your present firm or would you need to look elsewhere? If you're between jobs, what kind of office environment would be most appealing to you?

Take Stock of Past Successes

You can improve your odds of moving in the right direction by taking stock of your strengths and weaknesses and taking improvement steps where needed. Start with a personal assessment of your abilities and supplement it with input from others. Then, look for ways to overcome your professional liabilities. For instance, you might realize you need to seek additional accreditation, such as the certified legal manager (CLM) credential, in order to land your dream job.

Also consider increasing your involvement with professional groups, such as the Association of Legal Administrators. You can expand your network, stay abreast of industry trends and gain insights from others in your field, all of which can be beneficial if you're trying to uncover a new opportunity.

Making Your Job Work for You

An honest evaluation of what's missing in your career may be all that's needed to help you navigate a rough patch. By reviewing your work from many angles, you'll gain a broader sense of what's important to you and what you need to do to get back on track professionally.

Sometimes you don't need to make radical changes to better satisfy your career goals. For instance, you may find greater enjoyment in your current job simply by pursuing assignments that hold special interest for you, such as finding a new retirement plan provider or overhauling your firm's compensation structure. Or, you may be able to alter your responsibilities in a way that allows you to build on your strengths.

Any time you reach a career crossroads, it's helpful to take a step back and re-evaluate your direction. A thoughtful examination of your professional goals and achievements can yield enlightening information. Whether the process points you to a different path or simply offers insights to apply in your current position, it's certain to promote professional growth – and that's essential to achieving greater satisfaction in your work.

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