

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

Lawyers need to get a life

Last week I attended the “Get a Life” conference in Chicago. Its goal? Help attorneys discover how to “run [their] practice without running [themselves] into the ground.” It was a great conference — really interesting and knowledgeable speakers, relevant and timely topics, great people, delicious food and good times. The Total Practice Management Association did a great job, and it was well worth the trip.

Most notably, TPMA managed to put on a conference unlike any other I've ever attended. The overriding theme of the unique exhibit hall was difficult to miss: Practice law, but enjoy your life. Thus, in one corner, there was a large bunch of roses to smell. In another, a patch of green grass to walk on, a Wii game console in another, and free massages were offered the last corner of the room — not your average law conference.

As I listened to the speakers discuss topics ranging from legal marketing, practice management and work/life balance, however, I wondered why it is that lawyers need to be taught how to “get a life.”

Why is it that the practice of law tends to eradicate the semblance of a normal paced life? How does our profession manage to suck the joy from the lives of attorneys, leaving behind stressed out, argumentative, humorless individuals, eyes glazed over from fatigue, their personal lives in ruin?

I mulled over those questions as I absorbed the useful information being presented and became increasingly depressed at the notion that legal conferences of this nature were even necessary.

Without question, however, they are.

The practice of law is uniquely stressful, alienating and inflexible. Many lawyers leave the profession for greener pastures, including, somewhat ironically, many of the speakers at this conference. And, truth be told, they seemed much happier than some of the lawyers who were sitting in the audience.

That doesn't necessarily mean that leaving the law is the only way for lawyers to be happy. Those lawyers who unexpectedly lost their law jobs as a result of the recent economic downturn would be well advised to take a long, hard look at their lives and assess their level of career satisfaction, however.

Those who determine that the practice of law is more draining than it is fulfilling should look at their fate as an opportunity to pursue an alternative career. An unplanned job loss might very well be the incentive someone needs to “get a life” — a happier, more satisfying life outside of law.

If the practice of law continues to bring you joy, despite its inherent stresses, tweaking the ways in which you manage and promote your practice will reduce the stressors and increase career satisfaction. The conference was designed to provide information and tools for accomplishing that very task.

Attendees learned that targeted, effective marketing and online networking can bring clients in the door. Likewise, focused, intelligent hiring — and firing — strategies can reduce unpleasant management issues down the road. Similarly, outsourcing and the creative use of new technologies can simultaneously simplify a practice and cut costs.

If you enjoy practicing law, take steps to ensure that you will continue to do so. Make it a point to attend the “Get a Life” conference in 2010 and learn how to eliminate stressors and streamline your practice.

You deserve to have a life, and this conference will help you to get on the right track.

Nicole Black is of counsel to Fiandach and Fiandach, is the founder of lawtechTalk.com, which offers legal technology consulting services and publishes four legal blogs, one of which is Practicing law in the 21st Century (<http://21stcenturylaw.wordpress.com>); she may be reached at nblack@nicole-blackesq.com.



By **NICOLE BLACK**

Daily Record
Columnist