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Live and let live

*"You can checkout any time you like,
But you can never leave!"*

—FROM HOTEL CALIFORNIA BY THE EAGLES

For the most part, lawyers are not a happy bunch. Our profession's depression rates are amongst the highest, as are our rates of drug and alcohol abuse.

The practice of law can be a thankless job, the hours are long, and attorneys are subject to arbitrary, unpredictable court schedules and judge's whims.

Clients, the very heart of our business and without whom we would have no income, can make our job all the more frustrating. In many cases, however, the high frustration levels are not the fault of our clients, rather they arise out of the circumstances that lead those clients to retain us in the first place.

One of my favorite lawyer jokes highlights the phenomenon: George and Harry set out in a hot air balloon, soon realizing they were lost.

"We had better lose some altitude Harry so we can see exactly where we are."

Harry lets some hot air out of the balloon, and it begins to slowly descend below the cloud cover.

He yells down to a stranger on the ground, "Hey, Mister can you tell us where we are?"

"You're in a balloon about 100 feet up in the air," came the reply.

"He must be a lawyer," replied George. "The advice he just gave us is 100 percent accurate and totally useless!"

"You must be a client," the man on the ground yelled back, "You don't know where you are, you got into your predicament through a lack of planning, which could have been avoided by asking for help before you acted and you expect me to provide an instant remedy. You're in the exact same position you were in before we met, but somehow it's now my fault."

The moral of the story? It's not easy being a lawyer.

For that reason, a number of lawyers, when learning of my intent to attend law school after college, advised me not to do it, citing many of the reasons I discussed above.

Interestingly, many of those very same lawyers were quite vocal in their condemnation of my decision to take a hiatus from the legal field after having my first child.

At the time, I was disillusioned with my career choice, overwhelmed with work/life balance issues and ready for a change. A brief hiatus seemed like the perfect opportunity to clear my head and find a new career path.

I was surprised at the vehement disagreement other attorneys expressed regarding my decision. It was as though my personal decision was an act of betrayal. I chose to be inducted into this suicide-pact and leaving it was not an acceptable choice.

My subsequent return to the practice of law on a less-than-full-time basis, and my decision to write and consult about legal technology issues, also met with derision, albeit this time from lawyers online whom I've not yet had the pleasure to meet in person.

For some strange reasons I cannot quite comprehend, my personal and career choices somehow have disrupted the force and resulted in unrelenting scrutiny.

I knowingly turned my back on the unhappy fraternity we call the legal profession and defied the norm by returning to the legal field in a non-traditional manner. Now, I realize other attorneys' criticism of my choices is inevitable.

I reluctantly accept the phenomenon. It's the unfortunate price I must pay for forging my own path to happiness.

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