

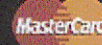
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Leaving the Law For a Better Life

By MARK HENRICKS

For some barristers, a law degree isn't a ticket to happiness.

The work's adversarial nature, long hours and emphasis on billable hours leave some attorneys looking for something better. "A significant cross-section of lawyers are dissatisfied with the quality of their professional lives," concluded a 1997 review of surveys by the Boston Bar Association. And a 2000 survey by the American Bar Association found about one lawyer in four unhappy with the occupation.

And some, like Sheila McCann, a former public defender, are doing something about it. She quit lawyering after losing an emotionally shattering case.

After investigating owning a bar and organizing sporting events, she decided to open a bakery. "I chose a bread bakery because it's about as far from the law as you can get," Ms. McCann says. "It's basic, nurturing work. You're happy to make it, you're happy to sell it, and people are happy to buy it."

That doesn't mean baking is always fun. The business can be seasonal, paychecks uncertain and the work monotonous compared to defending people accused of crimes. But she enjoys working for herself, is expanding opportunities by offering franchises and her current income matches the \$55,000 a year she earned as a public defender. "The only way I would go back

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is if there were some type of case that made an emotional appeal to me," she says.

Legal Training Can Help a Budding Business

Lawyers bring some obvious advantages to the business world, such as understanding and negotiating contracts and other legal documents, notes Suzanne Bell, a former corporate general counsel who left her last job when her employer was acquired in 2000. While taking time off to spend with her two children, she purchased a device to repel mosquitoes from her Florida yard, and decided to start a business selling the machines.

Being a pest-control entrepreneur is different from being a corporate attorney, but not that different. "From my years representing companies and being an in-house counsel, I did get exposure to a lot of businesses and have the opportunity to work with accounting, public-relations personnel, marketing and sales departments," says Ms. Bell, since last year president of Platinum Mosquito Protection Inc. of Weston, Fla.

Legal experience even helped one entrepreneur see a business opportunity when he faced a lawsuit from a much larger company. Scott E. Jordan spent eight years lawyering in various capacities before founding SCOTTeVEST Inc., a maker of "technology enabled" clothing with extra pockets and other features to accommodate cellphones, personal digital assistants, music players and other electronic paraphernalia.

Thus, when International Business Machines Corp. threatened to sue the tiny start-up over its use of a stylized "e" (similar to @), which resembled IBM's e-commerce-solutions brand, Mr. Jordan didn't panic. Instead, he says, "I sent out a press release about David vs. Goliath, knowing I would ultimately change the e." (His new logo -- see www.scottevest.com -- combines an e with a clothes hanger.)

The story appealed to wide range of media outlets and helped generate more than 1,000 articles and mentions on a score of TV shows. The attention spurred sales so much that he's earning more than he did practicing law, he says. And his lifestyle benefits are significant. He moved the company from Chicago to Ketchum, Idaho, because he liked the West. "It's a ski resort with a lot of outdoor activities," he explained by telephone one recent afternoon. "Right now I'm in my bike shorts after having taken a mountain-bike ride in the morning."

Another ex-attorney, Hindi Greenberg, moved near Lake Tahoe from San Francisco three years ago, figuring her 15-year-old business of career counseling for attorneys could operate there just as easily. Ms. Greenberg maintains a post-office box in San Francisco to give her firm, Lawyers In Transition, the cachet of a big-city address, but doesn't miss the crowds of the Bay Area. "Best decision I've made in a long time," she says of her move.

She has counseled attorneys who started legal-related businesses such as providing technology consulting to law firms, doing mediation training or running legal-temp agencies. They've also opened scuba-diving shops, become corporate humor consultants and many other ventures further from the bar. One commonality is that they're almost all happier as ex-lawyers, Ms. Greenberg says.

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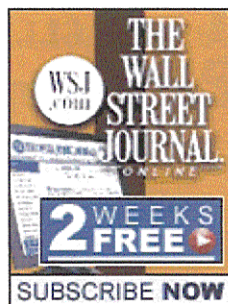
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Legal refugees give "many and varied reasons" for preferring business to law, but most are just happy to be away from the combination of combative atmosphere, long hours and over-focus on money. "There's always the pressure to represent other people's interests, and many clients never seem to feel like they won because, even if they win, they have to pay the lawyer," Ms. Greenberg adds.

Few Leave Law Entirely

Legal career counselors say many attorneys who are interested in career change want to start their own law firms. "They don't look at themselves as entrepreneurs, they just want to practice law in a smaller environment," says Neil Olson, a San Francisco career coach specializing in lawyers.

Lawyers interested in setting up solo or small practices represent half Mr. Olson's clients, he estimates. "Only about 10% want out of law," he adds, and many of those wind up taking jobs in other fields. Many lawyers can't imagine giving up the prestige: "Every person I talk to about leaving law talks about how hard it would be not to introduce themselves as an attorney," says Mr. Olson, himself a former attorney.

-- *Mr. Henricks, an Austin, Texas, journalist, is the author of "Not Just a Living: The Complete Guide to Creating a Business That Gives You a Life" (Perseus Books, 2002).*

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