

The logo for the New York City Bar, featuring the text "NEW YORK CITY BAR" in a serif font, centered between two horizontal blue bars.

NEW YORK CITY BAR

Transition to Happiness By Randi Rosenblatt*

Partly because the partnership of the words is often too rare, a truly “happy lawyer” often seemed undefinable to me. I learned, however, that the mistake is to not appreciate the term’s subjectivity. Being a lawyer can take innumerable forms, certainly enabling those of us who fall in the relatively “unhappy” camp to join our counterparts who find genuine happiness in the work they do.

Ever since I graduated Tulane with my J.D. and M.B.A. degrees, my goal was to get one of those coveted in-house counsel jobs. With more bumps in the road than I care to recall, I worked my way from law firm corporate associate (who hoped her deals would die by Friday) to in-house counsel — and I was ecstatic. Yet, the sheer bliss that I expected to feel when I left law firm life to join a company just never showed up. While there was pride and excitement in achieving my goal, I needed to determine what was next.

For years, I could identify my innate strengths and preferences — connecting people, mentoring junior lawyers, and conceptualizing programming ideas and taking them through execution. I was always that smiling face that helped others to see the bright side — all the things that surround the practice of law and help lawyers do their great work. I knew that was fairly unique to me, but I let those strengths and preferences operate in my life’s periphery for awhile before bringing them front and center. Looking back now, the direction I chose was patently obvious, but it took years of diversion and skepticism before I could find my way. While the course was not straight, I am grateful that it nonetheless led me here — to bliss, literally.

I came to personally define “happy lawyer” when I joined Bliss Lawyers as its Director of Business Development earlier this year. I am finally operating in my sweet spot and it is.... Well ...sweeter than I could have imagined. My worlds now collide in the most graceful way as I help businesses efficiently staff their legal teams and lawyers find their own happiness in alternative ways of working. And, it helps to let them know, from my experience, that there is no one way to be a happy lawyer. The term is, rightfully, undefinable.

With the hope that others can find their legal bliss with fewer sleepless nights than I, below are some unintended lessons I stumbled upon along the way:

1. **Get out from Behind Your Desk.** Make time to gain new connections and build your network! People’s individual stories are inspiring and force you to think beyond the fictional barriers you’ve created in your own career. They give you new ideas, approaches and perspectives. They also provide you with other introductions — the snowball effect that propels you to continue to get out there and expand your network.

2. **Imagine the Possibilities.** When considering transition, let your mind wander somewhat endlessly. If it is a transition from a law firm to a company, consider the potential in various industries. If you are contemplating shifting from private practice to government work, go beyond thinking of the agencies about which we all read. Get creative and dream a little (or a lot).
3. **Find Your Sweet Spot.** Look for the opportunity to not only do what you are good at, but also what you truly enjoy. The goal is to find something that allows you to enjoy your Mondays as much as your Fridays.
4. **Be Willing to Take a Risk.** In a legal world where certainty is a thing of the past, get comfortable with risk. Whether that means going from a big firm to a small firm, the financial services industry to the startup world, prepare for it, and take a leap! Not taking the chance may be your biggest disappointment.
5. **Don't Regret Your Past Decisions.** Every past experience has gotten you to where you are today — to acknowledge and realize that you want something different — and they prepared you incrementally and aggregately. Use those experiences to your advantage rather than wasting your time wondering why you didn't transition years ago.
6. **Don't Give Up. Ever.** If, like me, you realize you want to transition to a role that better suits you personally and professionally, find that role, or create it. Don't let it live in your imagination when it would be so much more fun to turn it into reality. Network, research, volunteer, ask questions, and seek advice (some of which you may decide to disregard, when appropriate). Do everything you need to do to make the right move.

I recognize that hindsight is 20/20 and we all have different obligations and constraints. But, if you are finding a need for something new, something different, and something sweeter, the commonality for us all is that bliss is out there — you just have to find it.

**Randi Rosenblatt is the Director of Business Development at Bliss Lawyers, an alternative legal model that places high-caliber attorneys in temporary and temp to perm engagements at companies and firms, and a member of the City Bar's Career Advancement and Management Committee. August 2016.*