

## Planning Your Career/ Planning Your Vacation

By Wendy L. Werner

It has often been said people spend more time planning their vacations than they do planning their careers. But my experience is that when it comes to lawyers, it may be a 50/50 split. Some of the people I know who spend a great deal of time working and thinking about work rarely put the same kind of time into planning their precious little free time. And some of the people I know who spend weeks researching their next trip fail to do so with the job that takes up the remaining 50 weeks of their year. This is advice for people that fall into either category.

### Why to plan a Vacation

If you're one of those people who never takes time off, or who finds yourself with no plan for the time that you're taking, here are some good reasons to take a vacation.

- Everyone gets stale at work. If you don't take any time away (and this refers to actually leaving town) you are unlikely to be refreshed and have a new perspective on things.
- You learn things about yourself by experiencing new situations. Although there's nothing wrong with taking the same week annually to visit the same place, you can benefit greatly from trying something completely new to you in a place you've never been.
- When you're away you can look back at your life from afar. There's a perspective you get from seeing your life at a distance with time to reflect that you may find difficult to get any other way. When you return you may find you've solved problems, gained new resolve, or developed new priorities.
- If you try out a new behavior when you're on vacation, you're more likely to put it into practice when you return. So, if you decide to get more exercise, try healthy eating, or reading, if you regularize the behavior when you're on vacation it's easier to blend this into your life when you're home.

### How to guarantee a good time

Depending upon your personal style and preferences, you may need different elements to create the vacation best likely to yield benefits that matter to you. There are a number of things you should take into consideration before planning your trip.

- **How do you feel about the planning process and the actual journey?** I happen to be a person who loves to plan a vacation. By this I mean reading about the location, gathering information about activities and places to see, and learning about the area. Some people prefer this part of the process to be done by others. Some people have different levels of frustration with the actual traveling process. Are you daunted by the idea of a twenty-hour car trip or do you see this as a chance to reconnect with your loved ones (if you're traveling with family or friends) or view this as a great opportunity for solace if you're traveling solo? Has airplane travel always been frightening to you and more so in 2002? You may want to consider a shorter driving trip, or travel by train. How are you with jet lag and airport hassles? Some people just consider this a necessary evil. And some people always manage to meet someone interesting while waiting for a plane.
- **Do you want rustic, budget, moderate or luxury?** Some travelers love the idea of replacing the familiar comforts of home with rustic adventure, while for others the idea of roughing it, is called room service. Where do you fall, and what are your budget constraints within your desire for a dream vacation? If you want to stay in the best hotel, maybe you'll scrimp a bit on the dining budget, or you may think you can stay at any place with four walls and a bed and splurge on good meals in a great town. Best to think about what matters most before you make those reservations.

- **Do you want city, country or combo?** If you spend much of your discretionary time commuting, picking up or dropping off kids, or flying to and from other cities taking depositions, maybe you want a quiet respite in the country. Maybe your adrenalin flows when you visit another large metropolitan area, see the museums, take in the theater and visit the sights. Or maybe you'd like a little of both. Take your pulse before you make the decision.
- **Veg out or Activate?** Is your idea of vacation drifting on a raft in the hotel pool, or sitting on a lounge chair by the beach reading the latest best seller? Or would you be happier rafting down the Colorado River, or hiking a piece of the Appalachian Trail? What about your traveling companion(s)? When you make plans to travel, unless you're on your own you will probably have to compromise with your traveling partner(s). The best time to talk through your wishes for the trip is *before* you hit the road.

I know a number of attorneys who say they can't plan a vacation because of their workload. I also know an attorney who travels for vacation at least two months per year. Granted, he has a tax and accounting practice and he doesn't have the unexpected demands of a trial practice. But he does good work, and he keeps his clients informed. Months in advance he will tell them he has plans to be gone during the following time period. And although he doesn't collect his phone mail daily, he does check several times a week to deal with potential problems. This lawyer does not have what some would call a highly successful practice from a monetary point of view. Nonetheless his life is very rich. It may have something to do with planning his career.

## Planning Your Career

Think of the best vacation you have ever had that you were responsible for planning. What made it so wonderful? Did you find the best place to go, a favorite time of year for the trip, and seek the advice and counsel of friends? Was it the company you took with you? Did you take note of what you enjoyed doing, or wanted to learn more about? Do you spend the same amount of time planning the 50 weeks of the year you are at work as you do for the two weeks that you're not?

## You can't know what you're looking for if you don't know what you like.

Many of us go from project to project without ever reflecting on how we feel about what we're doing. Many lawyers are so overwhelmed with their workload that they spend more time living in fear of dropping the ball, than knowing whether or not they like where they're carrying it.

Once a month, when the summary of time sheets are distributed, or when you're getting ready to pay the mortgage, take the opportunity to review your work. Create a computer 'work file' for yourself with several columns or categories. What are the projects or parts of projects you most enjoyed in the past month? What are the projects you enjoyed least? What are the activities you enjoyed, but need to explore or learn more about? What do you see as opportunities? This could include possibilities for further business, new clients, or learning opportunities. What were your major accomplishments for the month? Logging your accomplishments is a vital activity when it comes to planning for your annual performance review. But if you don't do it on a regular basis, it is doubtful you will remember what you've achieved when it's time for appraisal. If you don't regularize this activity, you won't do it. Take several hours per month to take this personal pulse so you know if you like what you're doing.

## Having information about what you like without knowing what you're best at is an incomplete basis for a plan.

Chances are there will be a link between what you inventoried as your most preferred work activities and what you're good at. But often when others assign tasks to us, it

may be because of what they see as our skills rather than our knowledge about what we think we're best at. So as well as making our own assessment about what we're good at – ask friends and trusted advisors for their take on our best skills. It's easier to plan a career when you're able to articulate to yourself and to others what you like the most and what you bring to the table that's unique. Take the time to make the journey one of your own choosing.

In the words of the writer, Stephen Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. "Start with the end in Mind". Planning a career and planning a vacation are much the same. They are an exploration of self with an eye toward your passions and interests, having the best time, and creating a plan to get you there. In the end, you are the only person who knows what will make the trip best for you. It's hard to plan for a good trip if you don't know where you're going. By the way, if you need any ideas about planning that trip, feel free to call me. I love to help people find their favorite destination.

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