



ATTORNEY SEARCH

by Stephen Seckler

Book Review: *What Can You Do with a Law Degree? A Lawyer's Guide to Career Alternatives Inside, Outside & Around the Law*, Deborah Arron, 2003, Niche Press, LLC, 352 pages

In August of this year, the Boston Bar Association released the final report of the Task Force on Professional Fulfillment. Under the able leadership of outgoing BBA President Joel Reck and former ABA President John Curtin, a committee of respected bar leaders made a broad series of recommendations on how law firms, corporate management, public employers, and the BBA can promote career satisfaction amongst lawyers.

The Task Force thoroughly analyzed the issues from a variety of perspectives. A good deal of the recommendations that emerged were focused on institutional responses (e.g., how firms can promote career satisfaction through better internal training programs, how flexible work arrangements can promote work/family balance, and how the BBA can decrease solo practitioner isolation by reinvigorating the BBA mentoring program). While the report does a terrific job of tackling the issues and proposing solutions at the macro level, individual attorneys wrestling with issues of career satisfaction may want some individual guidance. *What Can You Do with a Law Degree? A Lawyer's Guide to Career Alternatives Inside, Outside & Around the Law*, Third Edition, provides that guidance. It is a well-written, well-organized, optimistic, and completely updated handbook suitable for any attorney questioning his/her career choices.

The third edition of *What Can You Do with a Law Degree* does not break any new ground in the area of attorney career planning. Career placement professionals in law schools have been telling law students for years the importance of self-assessment, networking, and building professional relationships as soon as possible. In this new edition, the author, Deborah Arron does devote some time to the rules of the new workplace and offers valuable suggestions ("Take responsibility for your own career development," "Be adaptable and flexible," "Build a career portfolio, rather than trying to climb the ladder in one organization," "Invest in lifelong learning," "Look at technological savvy as a requirement, not an option."). But the real strengths of her work are her great organization, wonderful anecdotes, and easy-to-read format. She makes good use of bulleted lists, graphically offset information boxes, and has a terrific set of appendices.

Arron has been in the attorney career business for more than a decade. She wrote her first book, *Running From the Law*, while on sabbatical from her law practice. She never did return to the practice of law, but instead has cultivated a national reputation in the area of attorney career development. The principal thesis of *What Can You Do with a Law Degree* is that many attorneys in career transition are asking the wrong question. To paraphrase John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what you can do." But rather, "What do you want to do next with your law degree?"

Book Review: *What Can You Do with a Law Degree?*

Early on, Arron demonstrates that she understands how many lawyers think about career moves. In her foreword, she starts with a fictitious classified advertisement: "Law school graduates wanted for highly-paid positions in interesting fields. No previous experience necessary. Mail in your resume to fill an immediate job vacancy." She uses this ad to illustrate the point that many lawyers want a career move to fall into their laps. Most attorneys do not recognize that building a career takes a much more focused effort. She organizes her book to reflect the work that must be done. After an overview of career development in general and career development issues that face dissatisfied lawyers in particular, she includes sections on self-assessment, researching the job market, things to do when considering an exit from the legal profession, and specific tools and techniques to employ in a job hunt.

One of the most information-packed sections of the book is the appendix. In the six appendices, you can find references to career resources, whether you are thinking about a career in public relations, software consulting, or sports management. In this new edition, there are also references to Internet addresses for sources of information.

Scattered throughout the book are numerous anecdotes based on real conversations that Arron has had with attorneys in transition. In a discussion about resistance to change, she quotes a former practicing attorney who had been in the Air Force before becoming a lawyer. "One of the big lessons they tried to get across to us in the Air Force was when to bail out. Too often, pilots ride their planes into the ground because it seems more comfortable and familiar inside the cockpit of their crippled airplane than hanging outside from a parachute that might not open."

After reading *What Can You Do with a Law Degree*, you may still have no idea what to do next. Arron does not provide exhaustive descriptions of job titles that attorneys have filled (although she does provide 15 pages of capsule summaries of a broad array of jobs). But that is exactly the point. The art of finding career satisfaction is a lot of work and demands much introspection and research. Instead, *What Can You Do with a Law Degree* provides an easy-to-follow travel guide that can get you on your way. The book will help you choose a destination and gives you resources to consult en route. It can help you get to some exciting places where you can be a lot happier, but it is up to you to gather the information, make the choices, and head towards a destination.

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