



ATTORNEY SEARCH

by Stephen E. Seckler

“How’m I Doin’?”—An Online Career Assessment Tool

To go right to the tool, click [here](#).

Ed Koch served as mayor of New York throughout the 1980s and was famous for employing the phrase “How’m I doin’?” Throughout his administration, he would walk up to strangers on the street and pose this question. For a politician like Ed Koch, the answer was, of course, critical to survival.

When was the last time you took stock of your own career? Maybe no one can vote you out of office, but when was the last time you asked the lawyers and support staff you work with for some honest feedback?

“How’m I doin’?” is a question that has two components. It is important to get feedback from our coworkers (support staff, fellow associates, and partners) in order to grow. Whether it is formal or informal, feedback helps us understand how we are perceived in an organization. It highlights for us the areas where we need to improve. It helps us gauge our long-term prospects at a firm.

But self-assessment, the second component of “How’m I doin’?,” is equally important to your career success. It is healthy to take the time on a regular basis to ask yourself if you are building the career you want.

Doing Well in Law School Can Delay the Day of Reckoning.

If you have gone to a top law school and done reasonably well (or if you have gone to a second-tier law school and graduated near the top of your class), the chances are that you have ended up with a “great job” as an associate at a top law firm. Major law firms (and your career services office) made this easy for you. Through an elaborate on-campus interviewing program, you had many potential employers to choose from. Without giving much critical thought, you were able to drop your resume in a number of boxes, and employers then came to meet with you at your law school.

Through the on-campus interviewing process, you may have landed a job which suits your temperament, career interests, and values. But there is also a reasonable chance that your first job has proven to be a mismatch. Because on-campus interviewing is a passive method of searching for a job, it takes away the need for you to think strategically about your career. Instead of forcing you to think proactively about what you want from your first job, on-campus interviewing lets you choose from options which have been defined for you.

Regardless of How You End up in Your First Legal Job, Self-Assessment Is a Worthwhile Exercise.

If you did not have the benefit of landing your first job through on-campus interviewing, the job-search process may have forced you to be more reflective. Since employers did not come to campus trying to recruit you, you had to make more decisions about what kinds of legal jobs you would pursue.

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After a year or so, it is time to take stock of your experience. Whether you are working at a large firm that recruited you through on-campus interviewing or a smaller firm that you sought out on your own, ask yourself some questions. Do you like your work environment? Do you respect your fellow colleagues? Are you getting the kind of work that you enjoy? Are you building the skills you will need in the future to do the work you like to do?

In order to make this an easier exercise, I have created an online career audit tool. This tool is designed to help you think critically about your law firm experience. It is intended to help you identify whether you have issues with your current firm and, if so, whether these issues are serious enough to merit a lateral job search. The audit can be completed by clicking [here](#).

Self-Assessment Will Be Most Effective if You Have Developed Some Defined Career Goals.

Most career experts talk about the importance of setting career goals. Goals are like destinations on a map. If you do not know where you are going, it is hard to plot out a course to reach your destination.

Self-assessment is a way of evaluating whether you are on course to reach your destination. It is a way to see whether you have chosen the right route to reach your career goals.

If, for example, you want to be general counsel to a technology startup, then evaluate whether your present firm will give you sufficient exposure to these types of clients.

Career goals can also relate to your work environment rather than the specific type of work. Perhaps your goal is to practice corporate law in a general sense, but your specific goal is to become a partner at a firm that places a premium on collegiality and work-life balance. Ask yourself whether your current firm provides that environment.

The Career Audit Tool Can Also Be Used to Help You Create Some Longer-Term Career Goals.

If you have been practicing for several years and still have no long-term career goals, the BCG Career Audit Tool can also help you to begin formulating your goals. Even if you are having a positive experience at your firm, developing some goals will help you in the event that there are unexpected changes at your firm.

The legal profession has undergone tremendous change in the past 10 years. Firms are continuing to merge, and partner movement continues to be high. In addition, some very prominent firms have shut their doors in the last five years. What this means for you is that you can expect change. The firm you like and enjoy today may be very different tomorrow. If you have a good sense of your overall likes and dislikes, you will be better prepared to weather any unexpected change, and you will know when it is time to make a move. If you wait until a crisis hits, you will be making career decisions under duress.

Conclusions

Building a happy and successful career is an ongoing process. As you move through life, your goals may change. Getting married and starting a family, for example, may elevate the importance of income in your life. By the same token, a serious illness or seeing family members or colleagues getting sick may cause you to reevaluate how many hours you want to spend at work. Perhaps you will find that your interests have changed over time.

The point is that you should make self-assessment a regular exercise. Get feedback from those around you, but take the time to reflect on your goals. Have your goals changed in any way? Then, look at what you are doing to achieve these goals and measure whether you are on course. If you find that your goals and your actions are not aligned, don't be afraid to change directions. The stigma of job hopping is long gone from the legal profession.

The [BCG Career Audit Tool](#) is designed to help you reflect on your law firm experience. It is not the only way to assess your law firm experience. Speaking to a professional can be very helpful in this regard. But it is a good starting point for measuring your overall degree of satisfaction with your current situation.

If you have any input on how we can improve upon this tool, please do not hesitate to contact me. At BCG, we are very committed to helping lawyers who want to build satisfying careers. Your feedback helps us to meet this goal—i.e., doing the best job we can to help you with your career.