



ATTORNEY SEARCH

By Stephen E. Seckler

Two essential books for your career library

Much of what there is to say about legal careers and marketing has already been said. Get a great education. Follow your interests. Do great work. Find a good mentor. Provide outstanding customer service to clients and partners and treat support staff with respect.

But there are always new ways to present this material, and while the principles may seem simple, most of us fall down on implementation. In addition, most of what is in publication is aimed at new lawyers. There is not much in print for experienced lawyers who need help getting to the next step in their careers.

Two newly published books, “The Essential Little Book of Great Lawyering” and “The Right Moves: Job Search and Career Development Strategies for Lawyers,” fill this gap and both have something to offer senior associates who are trying to establish new career and marketing goals.

‘Great Lawyering’

“The Essential Little Book of Great Lawyering” is written and self published by James Durham. Jim is no stranger to many in the Massachusetts legal community. In many ways, he is uniquely qualified to write a treatise on great lawyering.

Jim, who currently serves as chief marketing officer at Ropes & Gray, has practiced law in a large Boston firm and worked as an in-house attorney. He has also consulted with law firms all over the country on marketing and business development and has spoken to hundreds of buyers of legal services to learn how they make buying decisions.

“The Essential Little Book of Great Lawyering” is more like a pamphlet than a treatise; you can read it in less than an hour. But it is packed with thought-provoking nuggets.

Durham starts by debunking a commonly heard marketing mantra (i.e., that in order to generate business, it is no longer sufficient for lawyers to provide great legal service). He does this by redefining “great lawyering.”

According to Durham, being a great lawyer means truly understanding a client’s business. It means being “responsive and available.” Being a great lawyer is not just about being a great technician.

In 53 pages, Durham packs a lot of wisdom for anyone looking to build a successful law practice. He does it in a way that is clear and the material is layered nicely (he tells us what he is going to say and then he tells us what he said).

His arguments are compelling and while he does not provide many anecdotes, that would have made this a very different (and much longer) read.

Two essential books for your career library

My only criticism is that his conclusions are troubling for anyone who cares about work/life balance. If being a great lawyer means always being available for a client, then it would seem that great lawyers can only take vacations where Blackberry service is available. I doubt this is what Durham means; but I'm not sure that his definition of a great lawyer leaves much room for uninterrupted family time or personal pursuits that have no marketing benefit.

'The Right Moves'

"The Right Moves: Job Search and Career Development Strategies for Lawyers," a new publication by the National Association for Law Placement, fills an important gap in the career library for lawyers.

There are many NALP and American Bar Association books to help law students and recent graduates choose a career path. There are also some very good books that can help dissatisfied lawyers assess whether to leave the profession. Until now, there has not been much on the market aimed at mid-level associates.

"The Right Moves" is an attempt to survey the career issues that confront a more experienced lawyer. The author, Valerie Fontaine, is a legal recruiter who has worked in the industry for more than 20 years.

The book is timely. It is now well documented that most law school graduates will leave their first employer within five years of graduation.

The book is a good compilation of the issues that might confront a mid-level associate and includes chapters on everything from planning a search to effective interviewing to making a smooth transition to a new firm.

The second chapter gives a good overview of the changes that have occurred in the legal profession in the past two decades. There are also some good lists (e.g., 20 questions to ask on an interview) and lots of practical tips ("don't burn bridges when you leave").

The book does have some areas for improvement. In the first chapter, the author discusses the importance of self-assessment and planning. But she offers little to help the reader accomplish this daunting task.

The second chapter on the new realities does describe the changes that have occurred in the legal profession; but the author could do more to suggest the practical implications of these changes.

Finally, the book could be strengthened with a lot with more anecdotes.

Nonetheless, "The Right Moves" is a good primer for any mid-level associate who is ready to think critically about his career. While no book can substitute for a good mentor or career professional, "The Right Moves" is a good way to get you started in your exploration.

Stephen Seckler is managing director of the Boston office of BCG Attorney Search, a national recruiting firm. He counsels associates and partners on lateral moves and maintains a blog at www.counseltocounsel.com/blog.html. He can be reached at seckler@bcgsearch.com.