

HOW TO CREATE THE LAW FIRM OF YOUR DREAMS BY DISCOVERING, FOCUSING AND ALIGNING PERSONAL AND LAW FIRM MISSION AND GOALS

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The most important element of getting somewhere is knowing where you are going, when. It sounds trite, but it is the most important secret to success in any endeavor. In this article, we will explore mission statements and goal setting.

What is success?

You must define success in your life. How do you want to lead your life? If you are retired and looking back, what type of life would make you feel you had lived the way you should? What will that life have looked like? What will you have done professionally, financially, spiritually? What type of family life will you have had? What friends will you have had? What principles will you have followed? To define success, you must answer those questions. You must define success before you can evaluate whether you are on the road to success.

Defining success involves a constant searching for the direction of your life and a constant effort to follow the direction. Discovering your purpose and learning to pursue it fully is the true joy of life. One cannot experience that joy and meaning by creating a law practice which is not consistent with it. If the law practice does not serve the life you want to lead, it will not succeed. There will be dissonance in your life. There will be strife. There may be a financially lucrative practice, but there will be other failures, such as marriage or loss of time with children, or health problems, which will detract from the success. Trouble caused by dissonance will also diminish any potential of success in practice; it will not be what it could have been. All things are tied together. Therefore, one successfully operate any practice without a complete inventory of one's life and one's's mission.

Steven Covey in his book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,¹ instructs that "we must begin with the end in mind." Think about it. What builder starts a building without first obtaining detailed architectural plans? He will have a color picture of the final product; he will have detailed blue prints of the frame, electrical and plumbing connections and lines, and foundation drawings. He will have a target dates to commence and finish the product.

At Yale, a study was done of graduates over twenty years. At graduation, only 3% of the students had written life plans or goals. Twenty years later, it was found that the 3% that had written their goals had 97% of the wealth. Do you need any more evidence than that!

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It Must Be in Writing.

It has been said that the most powerful force in the world is the written word. When words are in writing, they serve as a visual command.

In The Game of Work, the authors stress the necessity for written goals:

“Writing goals allows us to transfer our dreams into a specific plan that can be handed to others to work on. Written goals are not opinions or whims or wishes. Writing goals is the key sept that turns dreams into reality. It makes the difference between losing and winning.”² They are fixed and unchanged. They are not subject to differing recall.

A mission statement is a personal constitution. Think about the Constitution of the United States. What value would the Constitution have if it were not in writing? The answer, “It would have only the value that the most powerful man or force said it had, because they would be the ones saying what it was.” It would, therefore, guarantee no rights to anyone..

Writing Your Mission Statement.

There are no set rules for developing a mission statement. It can be a narrative description of your life. It can be a listing of values and goals and ways of living and being. It can be a series of “bullet points.” If you don’t have a particular way you want to write your statement, follow the following guide:

Pick the things that are important to you and them rank them in terms of importance. Use the following list and any thing else you deem appropriate. Place a number of priority by each thing, with “1” being the most important:

- financial security
- extreme wealth
- material possessions
- community
- family
- marriage
- children
- professional standing
- physical health
- control of environment
- creativity
- friends
- risk
- pursuit of talent
- peace
- spirituality

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balance
imbalance
avoiding danger
power
integrity
reputation
fun
joy
hobbies
relationships
seeing the world
learning
adventure
fame
politics
religion
advancement of a cause
leading an authentic life
living by chance
taking life as it comes
music
art
sports
developing your mind

Pick what's important to you and then rank the importance. Here is my list to serve as an example:

1. Spirituality/GOD
2. Marriage
3. Children
4. Business
5. Health
6. Friends and Community/service

My mission statement is about one and a half pages of single spaced typing. I take a paragraph to describe how I will lead my life in each area.

Create your mission statement right here:

The most important part of my life is (my relationship with GOD, or my marriage, or pursuing my talents, or making money)

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_____.

I will pursue this by

_____.

I will be a (loving spouse, or person of integrity or person in control of my destiny)

_____.

_____ (health, travel, learning, etc.) will be very important to me. I will pursue this by

_____.

_____ will be important to me and I will

_____.

_____ will be an integral part of my life and I will be involved in it by

_____.

_____.

_____.

_____.

Goals.

It is absolutely essential to success to create definite goals. Goal setting is the strongest force in the world for human motivation.” Success in life is equally enhanced by conceiving and writing goals.

Set Goals High.

When I started my practice, I set goals for how much I wanted to gross each month. To my shock and amazement, I attained the goal in my second year of practice on my own! The book, The Achievement Zone, advises that you should “set goals that are just out of reach, but not out of sight.”³

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Goals Create Opportunity.

Written goals are magical. I often tell people that “if you write it (a goal) down, it will happen!” Writing our goals opens our awareness to the people and circumstances necessary to achieve our goals, thus making them more likely to happen. Awareness is everything. Have you ever decided you liked a new type of car and thought to yourself, “you know, this car is new and there aren’t very many on the road yet.” And then, just as soon as you decide you like this type of car, you see it everywhere. Lets try this drill. Imagine that you are enamored with the new Volkswagens, in yellow. More than likely, every other car you see for the next several days is a yellow VW! This is the same phenomena of awareness that works for us when we write goals.

Here, we will create some personal goals. This process can be as long or as short as one desires. For purposes of this article, we will walk you through creating three goals for each part of your life for the next 20 years.

First, is an exercise I learned from motivational speaker Tony Robins. Lets imagine its Christmas Day and you can have any material, spiritual, mental or personal thing, matter or attribute you want on the face of the earth. Anything you want! Its important with this part of the exercise to not limit want you want by feasibility or practicality. If you want to have as much money as Bill Gates, write it down. If you want to go to the moon, write it down. If you want to learn a language or live in a foreign land for a year, write it down. If you want to learn karate or obtain a pilot’s licence, write it down.

Personal Wish List (what you want to obtain with your spirituality, your skills, your fitness, your looks, your hobbies and abilities, your marriage, your children, your service to community and disadvantaged, travel, etc.)

Financial Wish List (how much money do you want in savings, stocks, pensions, etc, homes, vacation homes, yearly income, play things such as boats, yachts and jets):

Professional Wish List (what skills do you want to have, what honors, what positions, etc.)

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Now, go back and put a number by each item representing the number of years that you think you should give yourself to achieve the goal (1, 5, 15, 20). Now take three goals from each category and plug them in to your personal goal list below:

Personal Goals:

One year: _____

Five year: _____

Ten year: _____

15 year: _____

20 year: _____

Financial Goals:

One year: _____

Five year: _____

Ten year: _____

15 year: _____

20 year: _____

Professional Goals: _____
One year: _____

Five year: _____

Ten year: _____

15 year: _____

20 year: _____

“He who cherishes a beautiful vision, a lofty ideal in his heart, will one day realize it.”⁴

Creating a Firm Mission and Goals.

Just as you must have a personal mission, you must also have a firm mission. All of the same principles apply. A firm mission statement stands as a beacon for all of your efforts. A firm mission statement should convey who you are, what you are trying to accomplish and how.

The Business Mission Must Be Consistent with the Personal Mission

To be successful, we must design a business mission which is consistent with our personal mission. “If we set goals for ourselves that are not consistent with the purpose of our lives, then we’ll find ourselves constantly frustrated, running up against the proverbial brick wall. We’ll not succeed, or if we do, it will be a hollow victory.”⁵

To design a firm mission statement answer the following questions:

- What kind of business do I need to create to serve my personal mission and goals?
- What kind of work will the firm do?
- Who will the firm serve?
- What are the values of the firm?
- What level of technical skill will the firm strive for?
- What level of service will the firm deliver?
- What will make the firm unique or give it distinction?
- What geographic area will the firm serve?

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Does what I have created serve my life's purpose and goals?

Enlist help. If you have a supportive and trusted staff, schedule a firm retreat. You might even want to hire a facilitator. Such facilitators can be found in private business and at local universities or community colleges. Get the whole staff away from the office and brainstorm about the firm mission and goals.

A firm mission statement should be short, such as a paragraph. And, it should be one that can be published to members of the firm, to clients and to the public. Here's a mission statement sample:

“Our firm guides people through divorce where there are complicated legal and financial issues. We provide a unique staff, including lawyers, support staff, an accountant and a licensed professional counselor, with the goal of providing unparalleled service to our clients.”

Develop a firm mission which can be easily delivered to people when meeting them at social occasions. It should be a statement which conveys the *meaning* of what you do, instead of telling people *what* you do. For example, you are at a party and you are introduced to someone and they say, “What do you do?” The common answer might be, “I am a divorce lawyer.” The common reaction to that: “Oh.” Instead, you might try, “I am a lawyer who guides people through family problems with a goal of securing the wealth they built during their marriage.” See Marketing Your Services, Chapter 3,⁶ for additional information.

Chart the Future

Once you have developed a firm mission statement, take some time to envision the future. Write a description of you and your firm at key, future intervals, such as five years from now, ten years from now, etc. Try the following work below and answer the following questions for each year.

Describe who will be in the firm.

How many lawyers?

What will be the expertise of the lawyers?

Will the firm be diverse?

Will the firm have different practice areas?

Will the firm expand to different cities or areas?

Will the firm build or buy a building?

What income will the firm or its members have?

What type of work environment will be created?

What hours will you be working and what role will you perform?

Firm Goals Worksheet

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My Firm Five Years From

Now: _____

My Firm Ten Years From

Now: _____

My Firm Fifteen Years From

Now: _____

My Firm Twenty Years From Now:

Just as you did with your personal goals, create concrete goals for your firm for important intervals in the future. Use the worksheet below:

Income or production goals:

One year: _____

Five year: _____

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Ten year: _____

15 year: _____

20 year: _____

Staffing Goals:

One year: _____

Five year: _____

Ten year: _____

Technology Goals:

One year: _____

Five year: _____

Ten year: _____

Conclusion. By discovering our life mission and focusing our energy on personal goals which give us passion for life and then aligning our practice mission and goals with those personal mission and goals, we can become the architects of the law firm of our dreams, a firm which serves our life's purpose.

End Notes

1. Covey, Steven R., The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (New York: Free Press, 1990).
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3. Murphy, Shane, The Achievement Zone, p. 35, (New York: Berkley Books, 1996).
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6. Putman, Anthony O., Marketing Your Services, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1990).