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Chapter I:

Know yourself and your goals

Hannah Beko

This introductory chapter will explore your dreams and aspirations for your future career and create some rock-solid plans for achieving those goals. What is it that you want for yourself, your life and your career? How can you make a road map to reach your goals? How can you deal with blocks and challenges?

A goal without a plan is just a wish.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry¹

Setting goals is the first step of turning the invisible into the visible.

Tony Robbins²

1. Who sets your goals?

There has been a problem with traditional goal setting we are familiar with in the corporate world of law. Our goals, particularly our career goals, are often set by our organisation or our boss and are presented to us as something that we have to achieve in the next 12 months. The annual review traditionally consists of a list of priorities for the

¹ www.goodreads.com/quotes/87476-a-goal-without-a-plan-is-just-a-wish.

² www.brainyquote.com/quotes/tony_robbins_147791.

coming year and a re-setting of KPIs based on an increase from the previous year.

It's been done this way for a long time, but does it work?

Where we don't have ownership of our own goals, where they haven't come from ourselves and what we want, we aren't particularly attached to them. Because of this, it can be tough for us to achieve them as we do not feel invested on a personal level. It may not be enjoyable or a way that makes us feel that we're growing as a person. It's not to say that goals won't be reached but attaining them comes from fear of letting others down or not achieving the standards expected by your firm and what implications that may have in the future. It is a negative motivator in that we are looking to get away from what we don't want to feel or experience, rather than moving positively towards something we do want.

In *Taming Tigers*, Jim Lawless talks about the importance of being positively motivated towards your goals, rather than being in fear of what might happen if you didn't achieve them. "Once you are motivated 'towards', you have power. Immense power. Now you have the ability to bring your whole self – mind, body and spirit – to the activity."³ Imagine how much easier achievements might become!

1.1 Is your career already mapped out for you?

The legal profession is very good at mapping out a career path for us all the way from degree to law school, to training contract and then the various stages of our post-qualification career up to partnership level. Whilst at the time of writing changes are envisaged to the traditional path of qualification, these are perhaps unlikely to alter the expected trajectory for most solicitors.

It is easy to get on the treadmill or conveyor belt and see those as the natural goals or automatic steps ahead of you. How often do lawyers stop to ask if those goals are meaningful for them, if it is something that they

3 Jim Lawless, *Taming Tigers: Do Things You Never Thought You Could*, Virgin Books, 2012, p88.

want to achieve, or if at certain times in their lives, those milestones are the right ones for them?

1.2 Are you at risk of drifting?

*Drift is the enemy of an intentional life. It happens when we conform to society, don't design our life or future, and just do the things we think we are supposed to do without giving them much thought.*⁴

In the legal profession we spend our early years throughout education and training being focused and intentional, but once we end up in our careers this purpose seems to go out the window and is replaced by hard work and more hard work!

CASE STUDY – SAMUEL

As an eight-year qualified lawyer, Samuel had worked for some of the largest firms in the world as he proudly told me. Now looking for his next position, considering his future, perhaps starting a family, he had made an automatic assumption that his future would be with another large prestigious firm. After some exploration through his coaching sessions about what he really wanted from his career, his life and his future, he realised that the sorts of firms he was looking at would very likely be incompatible with the life he wanted to create. It was time to choose between the firm and the life he saw for himself.

A very wise man once said the law is “a great career, but a terrible job”.⁵ We can thank Philip Jepson, a lawyer turned legal recruiter for this

⁴ Andy Storch, *Own Your Career Own Your Life*, Andy Storch Inc, 2020, p148.

⁵ Philip Jepson, “Taking control of your legal career”, Jepson Holt Legal Search & Recruitment, p9, https://jepsonholt.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Taking-control-of-your-legal-career_compressed.pdf.

pearl of wisdom. If we drift along in a career like this, without focus and intention, without being clear about what we want, we not only will not achieve what we're capable of, but it will feel like a long, hard slog to boot.

2. What is the best way to set goals?

A different, and perhaps more creative approach, is to spend time thinking about what it is that we really want on a personal and individual level. This might be in our careers, or in our personal life, or in relation to our health or our finances. Frequently we may have aspirations for improvement in all of these areas. Whatever area it is for you at present, it is essential to set aside some time on a reasonably regular basis to think about what it is that you want.

Before defining your goals, it can be helpful to start thinking about your 'big vision'. This is a broader definition of what it is that you want from your career and life. Goals tend to be, by their very nature, quite specific, which we will come on to later. A vision is much broader.

*Vision is a destination – a fixed point to which we focus all effort.
Strategy is a route – an adaptable path to get us where we want to go.*
Simon Sinek⁶

One's vision is not a road map but a compass.
Peter Block⁷

2.1 What does 'success' mean to you?

Before you start writing down your goals, it's essential to consider the long-term picture for you. The handy conveyor belt set out by the profession should not be used to measure success or become an automatically adopted road map. What is your version of success, something that is personal to you? It is too easy to say, 'I want to be a partner because that's seen as the pinnacle of the career'.

⁶ Twitter, 13 August 2012, <https://twitter.com/simonsinek/status/235068415075840000?lang=en>.

⁷ www.azquotes.com/quote/667314.

CASE STUDY – RICHARD

Richard moved firms following the promise of partnership. He worked his way through the firm requirements and reached that ‘coveted’ status. He brought in new clients, built a team and increased revenues. But he found that the weight of the title ‘partner’ (pressure not from his firm but that he put on himself) was something he didn’t want in life, and he moved on elsewhere, shedding the partner title. If you were to ask him now (as many recruiters do) if he would like a partnership title again, he will say no every time. It’s no longer a part of his vision or a measure of success in his life.

In *Own Your Career Own Your Life* Andy Storch says: “Unless you are signing a contract to join the military or law firm as a partner, you can almost always change your mind later.”⁸ But, even as a partner in a law firm, you can (and if it’s right you should) change your mind with the appropriate notice and arrangements.

This is my favourite definition of success:

Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it.

Maya Angelou⁹

If we adopt this version of success, rather than the one that is typically laid out before us in our profession, then we can start to think about what it is that makes us happy, what we enjoy, the best way that we find to work and how we can put all those elements together and think about a plan for our future.

8 Andy Storch, *Own Your Career Own Your Life*, Andy Storch Inc, 2020, www.linkedin.com/pulse/owning-your-career-starts-vision-andy-storch/?articleId=6630110298219048961.

9 www.goodreads.com/quotes/1208-success-is-liking-yourself-liking-what-you-do-and-liking.

2.2 Why do you need a vision?

Marianne Page, the author of *Simple, Logical, Repeatable*, explains a lack of vision very clearly. Without a clear idea of where we're heading in our life and career, it's like getting into the car without a map or (more likely these days) a satellite navigation system. We can drive around for hours, but not get anywhere. Fine for a Sunday drive, but not for our whole lives. "Knowing your destination is crucial. It keeps you focused. It inspires your team. It gives purpose and meaning to your planning."¹⁰

The goals we set are the strategy, the route or the road map. The vision is the compass or the destination. For this reason, a vision can be abstract or perhaps even vague, it can be a feeling rather than a defined picture.

Your vision can be what you see in your future when you allow yourself to dream:

- What do you want to see yourself doing?
- How do you want to feel about the various aspects of your life?
- Do you want to spend more time doing a certain activity, or perhaps less time doing it?

Most importantly it's about how you want to feel and how you see yourself. Once you have done some work on creating the bigger picture, the vision, the goals or milestones become easier to define.

CASE STUDY – GEMMA

I met Gemma just after she'd finished her training contract. She had been unemployed for a few months and was feeling deflated and unsure about her next steps. I remember, however, that she was very clear about what it was she wanted in the future, a role in international commercial litigation. She held on to this 'dream' and

10 Marianne Page, *Simple, Logical, Repeatable*, Rethink Press Ltd, 2017, p62.

just over two years later secured a position at a new up-and-coming firm doing exactly the work she wanted to be doing. We don't always need to know the 'how', it's enough to hold the vision and we will naturally make the decisions which take us closer to what we want. That's the power of a vision, a compass to your destination.

2.3 What is visualisation?

Visualisation is a powerful tool used in the sports industry. Encyclopedia.com says:

Visualization in sport is a training technique that forms a part of the larger science of sports psychology. Visualization is also known as mental imagery and rehearsal. Visualization is used primarily as a training tool, one that improves the quality of athletic movement, increases the power of concentration, and serves to reduce the pressures of competition on the athlete while building athletic confidence.¹¹

The theory behind visualisation is that the brain doesn't know the difference between what you're visualising, what you're imagining and what you're actually experiencing. And it allows your subconscious brain to take over. The logical part of us often stays on a fixed path and doesn't want to veer away. Whereas the subconscious, creative part of our mind, is able to explore different things and imagine different scenarios for us.

Now I'm not any sort of sportsperson, but I've found visualisation to be a fantastic tool for building confidence and answering those questions your logical brain just might not have an answer for. Lawyers are perhaps used to accessing their logical rational brain but less used to tapping into their powerful subconscious mind, where so much gold is kept.

¹¹ Visualisation in sport, Encyclopedia.com, www.encyclopedia.com/sports/sports-fitness-recreation-and-leisure-magazines/visualization-sport.

CASE STUDY – SARAH AND JOANNE

A few years ago, I used this exercise in a workshop with Sarah an employment lawyer. In her visualisation she saw herself in meetings all day, not at her desk drafting or doing paperwork, she was instead going from one meeting to another all day long. In the visualisation she found she really enjoyed her day! Less than a year later, I wasn't surprised to hear that she'd been promoted into a more senior role that was very much client facing and team leading, and not so much of her own fee-earning work anymore.

I've also shared this exercise with a self-employed lawyer who worked predominately at home on her own. In her visualisation, she saw herself with an office outside of her home and sharing that office space with a couple of employees who she'd brought into her business. A short time later she had expanded her business and brought in at least two more lawyers.

2.4 Ready to try some visualisation?

There are some fantastic exercises for you to use in order to start defining your own version of success.

- *Perfect day visualisation* is a simple meditation process that takes you through a day in your life around 12 months from now using visualisation techniques. Sitting quietly for 5–10 minutes, consider what your perfect day would look like through to what your surroundings look like and what activities you are spending your time on.

This is an extract from “Chapter I: Know yourself and your goals” by Hannah Beko, from the title *Future-proof Your Legal Career: 10 Core Areas of Professional Development*, published by Globe Law and Business.