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## Southern Association of Pre-Law Advisors

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### What's New!

*SAPLA Fall Meeting:*

[October 5th - 7th  
St. Thomas Law School  
Miami, FL](#)

*Advising Resources:*

[Financial Aid Toolkit](#)

*Paul Weber Memoriam*

[A Memoriam to Paul Weber: Teacher, Scholar, Leader](#)

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## President's Message

I am delighted to be serving as our organization's new president. Continued guidance and mentoring of our past presidents combined with support from our capable and willing executive board will make my job relatively pleasant. Past and future thanks to all of our members!

One of our focal points for the next couple of years will be enhancing the public image of the legal profession which has been under attack (sometimes deserved) for quite some time now. In short ENOUGH OF THE LAWYER BASHING! Granted there are several areas of our legal system that need to be addressed and perhaps reformed, but an emphasis on the negative is not healthy. There are thousands of current and future lawyers who are fine citizens, contributing greatly to their community.

I'm proud to be an attorney, proud to belong to a unique profession that has contributed so greatly to our democratic government and our system of justice. We

live in a countru that continues to attempt to maximize human freedom and if anyone thinks lawyers have had little or nothing to do with creating or maintaining those freedoms; well--think again.

However, too many in the legal profession have lost the sense of professionalism and ethics that must be adhered to on a daily basis; thus the tainted public image. Re-emphasizing professional and ethical obligations in our pre-law advising role is a good place to start. Individually and collectively, we can make even greater contributions to our respective states and our country. Think of the yet untapped potential for good that you, I, and our collective membership represent. It is time for us to go on the offensive, i.e., unjustified bashing of all attorneys has gone too far. An ongoing, positive public awarness campaign that emphasizes what's right with the legal profession is not inappropriate. Such a campaign can concentrate on four unique and vital roles of the lawyer:

1. as creators and defenders of a democratic society which maximizes human freedom;
2. as problem solvers in a civilized system of resolving disputes;
3. as voluntary contributors to the improvement of the quality of justice; and
4. as quality citizens contributing to their communities, states and country.

Let's include these expectations and obligations of lawyers in our pre-law advising discussions with our students.

Joe G. Chaney, Jr.  
President, SAPLA

P.S. Start making plans for Orlando.

## **Would You Be Happy as a Lawyer?**

by Paul J. Weber University of Louisville

"Happiness," says Madeline Reno, a family therapist, "happens between your ears." That is probably as good a place as any to begin considering whether one could be happy as an attorney. Happiness is a subjective state of mind, a sense of well being that depends on a wide variety of factors: health, personal relationships, sense of meaning, purpose and personal worth, as well as an appropriate sense of accomplishment. The exact proportions of each, the recipe for happiness, varies from individual to individual and situation to situation. There are no magic formulas; no one makes it through life without a good deal of suffering and disappointment to balance and flavor the successes. Achieving happiness depends on how one thinks and feels about one's life situation. It happens between one's ears.

It is also true that how one's career path and work life "fit" with one's aspirations, values, abilities and needs will have a great deal of impact on one's overall happiness. With that in mind, it may be well to spend some moments reflecting on whether a life in the law would be a source of satisfaction and joy for you. This may be particularly important at this time in history since numerous recent articles have discussed lawyer dissatisfaction and unhappiness with having chosen to pursue a legal career. Certainly a good amount of dissatisfaction comes from changing conditions in the legal field itself or from personal weaknesses, but it also seems clear that too many students going into law school in the 1970s and 1980s had unrealistic expectations when they chose a legal career, and may have lacked a good personal fit between the realities of law practice and their own values.

What can an undergraduate do to "test" whether being an attorney is a good career for him or her? While there are no certainties, there are some books and articles one can read, things one can do, and questions one can ask that will give clues as to whether law is likely to be a satisfying career. A book one might profitably begin with is Susan Bell (ed.), *Full Disclosure: Do You Really Want to be a Lawyer?* (Peterson's Guides, 1989). Not only does it provide thoughtful discussion of a variety of issues and perspectives, but the cartoons are entertaining.

Although far too few Pre-law students take the opportunity, just shadowing one's family attorney for a day can be an eye opening experience. Landing a summer orpart-time job as a runner for a law firm while in college gives an even better view of what the nitty gritty, day to day life of an attorney is like. Probably best, if one has the time, is to get a variety of experiences, from observing in a courtroom, to shadowing a

corporate inhouse attorney, a prosecutor and a general counsel, to interviewing several lawyers. Some colleges and universities will allow credit for internships or experiential learning in a law firm. There are many subcareers within the field of law and exposure to several will help one make a more informed decision.

Are there questions one can ask one self to clarify a career choice? Of course. Baylor University Law School recently sent out a small pamphlet that includes the following questions:

1. Do I enjoy working closely with people regarding significant events or issues affecting their lives?
2. Can I empathize with a client's situation, yet have the ability to analyze the issues and their consequences objectively, in the light of existing law?
3. Do I enjoy educating or teaching a person about a subject about which she or he may be ignorant or have significant misconceptions?
4. Am I able to articulate in a clear and concise manner my analysis of a problem to others, whether it be verbally or in writing?
5. Do I enjoy being an advocate? Can I argue both sides of the question with enthusiasm?
6. Do I like to read and study?

The above questions were obviously written by law school admissions people in cahoots with law professors, but they are a good place to start. If one answers "yes" to most of them, law is probably an attractive career option. I would add a few more "realistic" type questions, such as:

- Can I balance career goals with quality of life goals? (DO I do it now?) Or am I the kind of competitor who will focus my all in the legal arena? Put another way, do I have hobbies, friendships and interests that have little or no relation to my career interests? [The bad news is that a narrow career focus tends to lead to early burnout and enormous unhappiness.]
- Am I naturally competitive? Do I like competitive activities like card games, board games, sports, etc.?
- Can I take life's little losses in stride, recognizing that "you can't win 'em all"?
- Can I "hold my own" in verbal and written disagreements? Can I maintain inner peace in the presence of verbal conflict and angry people? Or does that type of thing really get to me? If I can't, am I willing to learn how?
- Do deadlines motivate me? Or do they hang over like ever ready guillotines?
- Am I a decent negotiator with family and friends when differences of opinion or conflicts arise?
- Am I comfortable working many hours on most work days? Or am I pretty much a "40 hours and that's it" type of person?
- Do I have high status needs? Can I live with the ambiguity and misunderstanding most people have about the roles of lawyers in our society?
- Do I like taking on responsibilities, seeing them as challenges? Or do they feel more like burdens?
- Do I like to solve problems and puzzles?; explore alternative solutions?; devise strategies? Or do I really like clear rules and unambiguous answers?
- Do I recognize that the law field is crowded with talented, hard working people, and that I may have difficulty getting an "ideal job" or making more than a modest living? Am I willing to take that risk? [Only 6% of lawyers made more than \$100,000 in 1992.]

These are, of course, unsystematic questions. But if one answers NO to very many of the first questions, or an emphatic, non- negotiable NO! to even a few, one might want to pause before plunging into a legal career. Dreams and ideals are wonderful-- even necessary--when one considers any career. But ideals and reality cannot be so far removed from one another that they never touch. Only a saint would be happy doing something she detests day in and day out.

Finally, are there any standardized tests or interest inventories that can help one see whether a legal career would be a satisfying option? The jury is still out on this one. Many schools have career planning and placement centers which offer one or another interest/aptitude tests. These can be helpful in highlighting the kinds of work one prefers. They are not intended to pinpoint specific careers. By all means students should take advantage of these services and consider the results as one of many indicators.

Several years ago Anthony Monahan wrote an article, "Are You at Loose Ends?" in Barrister Magazine (Spring, 1991, p. 22 ff.) that goes a step further to discuss several career-evaluation tests used to help young lawyers sort out their suitability for specific kinds of practice. Perhaps some of his insights may be useful to pre-law students as well. A major tool for such evaluations is the Myers-Briggs Indicator. It may be helpful to quote at some length from the Monahan piece, then close with a few observations:

It begins with a questionnaire--92 multiple choice and word preference questions, for example, on the self-scoreable measurement. The result is a four-letter indicator of your type: Extroversion (E) or Introversion (I); Sensing (S) or Intuition (N); Thinking (T) or Feeling (F); Judging (J) or Perceiving (P). Sixteen basic personality letter-code types, then, are indicated by the Myers-Briggs system.

The personality type most frequently found in law, say some researchers, is ESTJ. "Extroverts are more energized by the outer world, focusing their attention more on social interaction than inner reflection. Sensors use all their senses to take in information, thus are likely to be no nonsense, realistic, pragmatic people who look for facts rather than theory. Thinkers are logical in decision-making, more comfortable being detached, objective, sensible. Judgers are organized and decisive, keep projects on schedule, want to get to the point. The ESTJ style can be described as the natural manager."

Other personality types drawn to law are ENTJs ("the 'take charge' people in law firms"); ISTJs ("the most meticulous and overly prepared, the classic perfectionists") and ENTPs ("the legal profession's entrepreneurs, risk-takers, frequently scattered").

A person considering a legal career may wish to take the Myers-Briggs Indicator and use the results as one factor of preference. A word of warning, however. Experts trained in the Myers-Briggs object strongly to any "mechanistic" use of the test. There are too many intervening variables and sub-specialties in law to make generalizations very useful. If nothing more, the results can trigger interesting conversations and reflections. Monahan and others rightly caution, however, that these are indicators, not predestination.

Can you be happy as an attorney? Ultimately the decision can only be made by an individual contemplating such a career. It is worth some reflection and effort to find out.

This article is reproduced from the SAPLA Handbook for Pre-Law Advisors, which is available to any current member of SAPLA.

Webpage editor's note:

The 1995-96 list of SAPLA conference attendees was not available. Also the treasurer's report of 11/21/95 was not available for reproduction here.

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