

Outline Steps to Identify, Achieve Goals, Panel Advises

By Nicole C. Edwards

DURING THIS PAST YEAR, MANY ATTORNEYS have come to believe that their careers are dictated by the state of the economy. Despite these outside forces, however, most aspects of our careers are still within our control. As explained by past Chancellor Jane Leslie Dalton, a partner at Duane Morris LLP, Charisse Lillie, a senior vice president at Comcast, and Arthur Bousel, a consultant at Lawyer 2 Lawyer Career Management, the best way for attorneys to maintain control of their careers is by getting in the habit of identifying their goals and outlining the steps needed to achieve them.

Taking control of your career involves a simple three-step process – identifying goals, prioritizing goals and achieving them. The three spoke at the Dec. 15 meeting of the Attorney Career Development Committee.

For the first step of identifying goals, the panelists stressed the importance of writing goals down. While it is useful to mentally identify goals, writing goals makes them more “real” and thus more likely to be achieved. For those having trouble identifying their goals, Bousel suggested the following tips:

- Take note of the subject of your day-dreams because they are often things that you are passionate about.
- Write a list of goals that you would want to achieve, if you knew that you would not fail. This will identify the goals that truly interest you, but that you may



Past Chancellor Jane Leslie Dalton (left) and Charisse Lillie joined Committee Chair Arthur Bousel (not pictured) to discuss identifying and achieving career goals at the Dec. 15 meeting of the Attorney Career Development Committee.

avoid pursuing due to fear of failing.

- Talk to your colleagues and find out what they are doing. This may give you information about career options that you never knew existed.
- Ask your friends to help you. Sometimes, others can see your strengths more easily than you can.

Once you have a list of your goals, the next step is to prioritize them. For each of your goals, create a value proposition, weighing each goal's strengths and weaknesses, and then rank them accordingly. The goals where you can make the most compelling start today should be at the top of your list.

Finally, create an attorney development plan to outline the steps needed to

accomplish your goals. This plan should delineate the action steps you must take to gain the skills, competencies and experiences needed to achieve your goals. This plan should include due dates for achieving each action step and follow-up dates for assessing your progress and making adjustments as needed.

Lillie stressed that the key to being successful under this plan is to think in terms of “baby steps.” She explained that the best way to avoid frustration when trying to achieve a big goal is to break down the goal into smaller, more manageable goals. Similarly, Dalton emphasized the importance of remembering and keeping a list of your accomplishments while progressing through your goals. She stated that this will give you more confidence when it comes time to face a particularly challenging goal.

The panel concluded by emphasizing that by making this process a habit, as they did, any career goal will be within your reach.

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Economy Takes Toll on Orders for Support

By Julia Swain

UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS HAVE SUBSTANTIALLY increased in the past year due to the economic downturn. As a result, many support orders have been affected as job loss constitutes a change in circumstance that may warrant a reduction of a support order. Daniel J. Sulman, master in support, and James Gallagher, Domestic Relations Establishment supervisor, presented at the Family Law Section meeting on Dec. 7 on how the Philadelphia Family Court is handling the effect of unemployment in support actions.

Domestic Relations has a direct interface with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Employment to verify claimant's unemployment benefits eligibility status, including the benefit amount and duration. Attachments of benefits for support purposes can be done automatically by Domestic Relations through this interface capability. Further, most employers are required by the federal government to report newly hired employees. Therefore, if a support payor receiving unemployment benefits later secures employment, Domestic Relations can and does find out the information and can issue a wage attachment for support to the new employer.

Unemployment benefits are subject to unique tax treatment, different from regular wages. The benefits are subject to federal tax, but not state, local or Medicare tax. Any support payor who was self-employed, paid wages in cash or under the table or received 1099 income is not eligible for unemployment compensation benefits.

Once unemployment benefits are approved, the amount of benefits will typically be used as the recipient's income for support calculations. However, an earning capacity can still be assessed against the recipient of unemployment compensation if the reason for approval of the benefits is questionable. For example, an employer may have failed to appear at a hearing or the employee was fired for cause but the employer chose not to challenge the unemployment compensation claim. In presenting or defending against an earning capacity argument in this situation (as in most) the unem-

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Virtual Tools Promote Diversity, Inclusion

THE ADVENT OF WEB 2.0 has inspired the corporate community to explore new approaches to achieving internal organizational development goals. Although a precise definition of Web 2.0 remains elusive, experts in the field agree that at the very least, the term refers to a set of next-generation Internet technologies, many of which are social in nature. Such utilities as Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, blogs, and wikis all fall into this category.

Corporations are leveraging the power of Web 2.0 to create virtual employee communities that generate a range of benefits. Best Buy created a social network called Blue Shirt Nation that many employees use to share information,

By Karen J. Vaughn



knowledge, best practices and otherwise maintain an open dialogue. (Participation is voluntary.) Over time, the company discovered that the turnover rate of employees who contributed to Blue Shirt Nation was significantly lower than the rate for the workforce overall. Faced with the challenge of not being

able to keep abreast of what each other was doing, an Internet marketing team at Kaiser Permanente developed an internal wiki that resulted in greater transparency and more efficient collaboration. General Electric's storied internal network, Support Central, hosts a combination of wikis, documents and blogs. This allows the company's workforce to communicate and share expertise.

How can law firms incorporate Web 2.0 tools into their plans for promoting diversity and inclusion? In the first instance, given the fact that the essence of diversity and inclusion is to acknowledge and respect the different perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences that all employees bring to the table, creating a social network within a firm to which all employees have access represents an opportunity to create an environment of constant dialogue and interaction that will foster understanding and result in a culture of greater inclusion.

From the recruitment standpoint, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, among others, are excellent supplements to traditional approaches for developing diverse candidate pools. Other technologies can be used to support initiatives designed to promote retention and career advancement. For example, law firm affinity groups, typically composed of historically underrepresented attorney populations, can utilize wikis to collaborate on programming and otherwise pursue

their mission in a more efficient manner. Since many of these lawyers work in firms with multiple offices, wikis have the added benefit of ameliorating feelings of isolation that those who work in smaller offices or practice groups sometimes experience, thereby promoting retention.

Web conferencing – live meetings via the Internet – can be used to deliver training on such fundamental issues as the business case for diversity. The polling feature offered by many of these services is particularly attractive because it allows the presenter to both reinforce knowledge and information shared with the audience and gauge the effectiveness of the training in real time.

These are just a few examples of ways law firms can use Web 2.0 tools to advance diversity and inclusion objectives. New approaches are welcome and encouraged.

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VIP Honors Matthew Jones

PHILADELPHIA VIP RECOGNIZES MATTHEW C. JONES, a partner at Duane Morris LLP, as Volunteer of the Month for his outstanding assistance to VIP clients.

Jones began volunteering at VIP in 2000 and has used his corporate expertise to help more than 10 nonprofit organizations incorporate and obtain tax-exempt status. He has also shared his knowledge of nonprofit law with others. Jones has led several seminars for nonprofits on legal issues and is always just a phone call away for an attorney seeking guidance.

Jones has assisted a diverse set of nonprofit clients at VIP, ranging from a home and school association to a retired correctional officers' organization. VIP truly values Jones' willingness to step in at a moment's notice to assist VIP clients. He is representing a faith-based nonprofit client needing assistance to obtain tax-exempt status. Because of his dedication to VIP and his immense expertise, he has helped VIP's nonprofit clients to easily navigate the legal process and focus instead on their mission of helping others.

Such benefits will have to be paid by the terminated employee, but may be less costly than an individual private health insurance plan.

Additionally, terminated employees eligible for unemployment compensation may also be eligible for a health insurance subsidy for up to 35 percent of the cost. This subsidy is for a limited term, and generally not for the entire 18-month term of unemployment benefits. To qualify for the health insurance subsidy, the employee's termination must have occurred between Sept. 1, 2008 and Dec. 31, 2009. Legislation was pending in December to extend the deadline.

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ployed litigant must show that he or she has made a reasonable and diligent effort to secure employment. Copies or a log of employment applications, follow up after the application, rejection letters and e-mails are all relevant evidence for the court's consideration. If the unemployed litigant can prove reasonable efforts to mitigate job loss the court is much less likely to assess an earning capacity in addition to the amount of unemployment benefits received by that litigant.

Unemployed litigants should be aware that despite their termination from employment (for reasons other than gross misconduct), they are still likely eligible for COBRA benefits, which provides for continuation of health insurance.

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