

Assistance Available for Job-Seekers in Washington's Tough Market

by Virginia Nicholson

It has become a little stressful in the woods of the legal profession, even more so if you are one of the more than 3,900 lawyers who have been laid off from law firms nationwide since January (see <http://lawshucks.com/layoff-tracker/>). The Pacific Northwest, sad to say, has not been immune from the shrinking legal market. As many attorneys look for a position, attorneys are increasingly facing difficult decisions. Do you become a solo practitioner? Do you relocate? Even those with jobs face repercussions from the economic downturn, such as an increased need to take on clients they would not have considered a year ago.

If you are one of the many feeling the sting of this economy, says Dr. Dan Crystal of the WSBA's Lawyers Assistance Program, the WSBA can help. It is never easy finding a new, or first, legal position. "Seattle has always been a hard market," explains Crystal, who, along with Dr. Rebecca Nerison, runs the WSBA's job-seeker programs. "At every experience level, it can take up to a year or longer to find a legal job in Seattle."

But with the doom and gloom comes a silver lining. While the job-seeking process is not easy, it is valuable. "It is the things that people do to market themselves and network that end up being the most important tools they bring with them to a new position," Crystal

explained when discussing the upside of job searches. "For example, the list of people you gather during your job search to network, which turns into a referral source."

The WSBA has two different programs designed to help job-seekers compile their networking list and find a job. These programs are geared to help lawyers determine what type of job suits the job-seeker. Crystal feels fortunate to see the

"Aha!" moment on a job-seeker's face when she figures out what it is she really wants to do. He said that they do not have hard data regarding the success of the programs, but the feedback is positive. Participating attorneys are not only finding jobs, but finding jobs they are well-suited for.

The monthly Job Seekers Group provides the job seeker with the opportunity to network and exchange information and ideas with other lawyers. The group features speakers who discuss topics of interest. For example, past speakers have discussed how to use social media and network; how to brand yourself as a lawyer; how to identify the area of law that interests you; and the psychology of interviewing. Speakers also offer practical advice about cover letters, résumés, and interviews. The monthly Job Seekers Group is open to all WSBA members and third-year law students. It is held the second Wednesday of each month, from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the WSBA office.

The group is free and no registration is necessary.

There is also a weekly Job Seekers Group. This weekly group is an excellent resource for those unsure about their futures within the law. Many have utilized the group in order to figure out what line of work will be best for them. This group has a more in-depth focus on three areas of the job search: job-seeking skills, the identity search, and addressing the emotional challenge of unemployment.

The job-seeking skills area of the program includes the nuts and bolts of the job search, and includes collecting that all-important referral network. The identity search helps participants determine what job would be perfect for them. Crystal pointed out that sometimes the perfect job for an attorney turns out to be outside the legal profession. The emotional challenge of being unemployed is the third focus of

the group. It is important for job-seekers to know that they are not alone in their struggle. "The participating attorneys start out as strangers, but by the end of the program, they are going out for coffee and becoming friends with people they never imagined they would," said Crystal, describing the camaraderie that develops within the group. The weekly Job Seekers Group requires more of a commitment than the monthly group: Each group has 8-10 members and runs for eight sessions. Group meetings last for 75 minutes and members are charged \$40 up front, which amounts to \$5 per session.

Stress from the economic downturn can lead to exhaustion and the development of distress symptoms, such as clinical depression, eating disorders, chronic procrastination, alcoholism, anxiety attacks, and anger problems. To help with these issues, or for those seeking individual assistance with job-seeking or other life skills, the WSBA offers individual counseling. Attorneys who take advantage of the individualized counseling have reduced, and are reducing, their distress and ending their isolation. Individual therapy is provided by licensed psychologists, including Crystal. The treatment is provided on a sliding scale based upon income, and an initial consultation is only \$20.

It is nice to know there are resources to turn to when you need some guidance, insight, or just camaraderie with fellow job-seekers. The WSBA offers a wide variety of assistance in different formats geared to assist the seasoned professional, the third-year law student, and every experience level in between. For more information regarding these and other assistance programs, visit www.wsba.org/lawyers/services/lap.htm. ◊

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