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Seven Skills Attorneys Have That The Rest Of The World Would Die For

Casey Berman talks about the unique skill set that lawyers possess and how it can enable them to successfully leave law behind.

By CASEY BERMAN on April 3, 2014 at 2:42 PM

Some of us lawyers want to leave the law: We are unhappy and dissatisfied with our work situation. We suffer long hours. We find our day-to-day lawyer tasks mostly uninteresting. We are demotivated because we are not included in the partner track discussions. We feel we receive little-to-no mentoring. We are weighed down by high student loans.

And maybe most important, we feel that our professional skill set is not really in alignment with the duties and responsibilities required to be a lawyer. We are not fully confident that we can be a real good lawyer. It's turning out that what we are good at doing and what we enjoy doing isn't what an attorney does. We're pretty sure that this lawyer gig is really not for us.

But we don't leave the law because we have sincere doubts that any of our legal job skills are transferrable to any non-legal jobs. We find it unrealistic that someone outside of a law firm would even consider hiring a lawyer like us. We don't believe that we have any marketable skills that a non-legal business would want.



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But we do. We lawyers who want to leave the law possess a skill set and an array of talents that are actually in high demand by many businesses. Let's see how.

Client Management: In a business, any business, whether it sells a product or provides a service, there are people it sells to or works closely with that need to be managed and attended to (call them customers or clients or partners or stakeholders or shareholders or advisors or any number of other descriptive terms). These real, live, human customers need to be understood, coddled, directed, serviced, upsold, excited and reigned in.

Working with clients is something we lawyers do day-in and day-out. A lawyer's ability to listen, issue spot and relate with these real, live, human people is a skill that not everyone has. This skill is essential to a company's relationship building, reputation growth, client retention and customer support.

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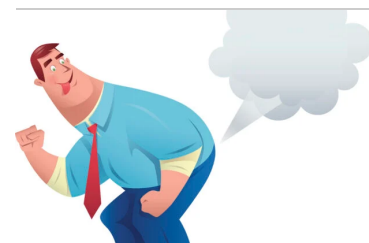
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Upselling: If a business provides value to its customers, the customers will naturally come back for more. But oftentimes, businesses need to proactively suggest and highlight potential products and services and future projects to their captive customer base. This of course helps the business grow its revenue, and also provides a valuable service to a customer by (sincerely) suggesting other products and services to which the customer can avail him or herself.



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Whether we realize it or not, we attorneys are always upselling. Attorneys with close client contact will often suggest other courses of action, other defenses to approach, other research and analysis angles, other agreements to put in place, other services to consider, other advisors to contact. Upselling new ideas is instinctual for us ... and can be an extremely valuable skill set for every business and appreciated by its customers.

Issue Spotting: Believe it or not, the "I" in IRAC could be our ticket to a new gig. In business, there are always issues, messes, projects, and things to figure out. Something always goes wrong, and a solution to fix it needs to be hatched. Or something goes phenomenally right and this new opportunity presents a multitude of new options. As such, decisions need to be made, strategies need to be devised, communications need to be delivered, next steps need to be agreed upon, and teams need to be created to execute.

This is what we do daily. Who better than an attorney to jump up to that white board in the conference room, assess the mess of options and gradually moderate all of the executives to spot the issues that affect the business most, objectively prioritize actions, and then calmly delegate to the most responsible employees? We don't need to necessarily make the final call; we just need to create the environment for the executive team to calmly make informed, thorough, and educated decisions on what to do next. We issue spot for a living for our clients ... we can do the same for businesses out there.

Clear and Concise Prose: Attorneys write. A lot. And we write well. We write clearly, precisely and in a thoughtful, informative manner.

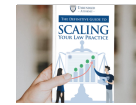
And so much of business nowadays is also about writing: People from all types of companies write stuff ... emails, PowerPoints, proposals, reviews, reports, bios, pitch books, social media content, marketing content.

And it's a sad fact, but across many businesses, so much of this content is not written well: It's unclear, not spaced correctly, un-relatable, grammatically incorrect or just plain indecipherable. People go back and forth trying to understand each other or send multiple versions trying to come to a final result. Time is wasted, important issues are misunderstood, frustration grows, productivity is reduced.

Our writing style can help. We can craft explanatory emails. We can draw up informative presentations. We can put together persuasive pitches. And we can do all of this in less time and with less confusion than many non-lawyers can. We've already been trained to write understandable, persuasive content for discerning readers (judges, opposing counsel, clients). In the current Information and Content Age, this is a skill any business would love to get its hands on.

Interpersonal Skills: Even with telecommuting, virtual offices and the internet, business is won and lost and grows and retracts based on personal relationships. People do business with whom they trust, with whom they find

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commonality and with whom they like. And these relationships are built on clear communication, exchanges of ideas and getting to know each other.

While not all lawyers would rank interpersonal skills as their top strength, many do. We rain make new business, we build relationships with opposing counsel, we get to know judges and staff, we become trusted advisors to companies and organizations. All of these relationship skills are also in heavy demand by businesses, who need interactive people to build strong personal relationships and lead important strategic initiatives.

Dependable, Disciplined and Loyal: In addition to people they can trust and like, business owners need workers they can depend on. Things need to get done, fires need to be put out, projects need to be kickstarted. The person that just gets stuff done on time, even if it's not perfect, is of immense value.

We lawyers are solid people. We can be counted on. We meet deadlines. We are used to keeping confidentiality, professional ethics, and fiduciary duties. In short, we have been regulated our whole lives and while this may wear on us or the responsibility may even cause us anxiety as practicing lawyers, it has distilled in us a distinct sense of responsibility and duty that is indispensable for businesses looking for solid people to hire.

Working Long Hours: People in business put in a lot of hard work. Nowadays, with the 24/7 cycle, it seems like everyone is always working.

And we of course work hard too. Attorneys work into the evenings throughout the work week. We come into the office around noon on Sundays. We work around the clock when the deal or the trial requires it. Going the extra mile (and miles after that) is expected in our day-to-day as a lawyer.

Of course, these long hours are a major driver for many wanting to leave the law. But in the non-legal business world, where people work hard but where "normal lawyer" hours are definitely not the norm, we will by default often be the hardest worker in the room. This means that we can achieve some of the reduced hour lifestyle we so desperately want, while also contributing mightily to our company and its mission.

So keep this in mind – what we lawyers do day to day is not solely reserved for the practice of the law. There is a wide world out there of other, non-legal roles that may be a fit with our skill set and strengths.

Casey Berman (University of California, Hastings '99), head of strategy for a San Francisco based technology company, investment banker and former in-house counsel, is also the founder of [Leave Law Behind](#), a blog and community that focuses on helping unhappy attorneys leave the law.

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