

# Personal Reassessment In a Hardscrabble Time

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**H**undreds of lawyers are suffering the anguish and trauma of job loss or lay-off. If you're among them, you are justifiably angry and frustrated. Caught in a swirl of events you did not cause or shape, you are searching for ways to regain your footing and your pride. What's the best way to fight your way back? Back to school to train for a related career? Cram course in a new career? Net-work? Invest in a tutored resume? Register with a professional employment service?

May I suggest another step first? Why not pause long enough to take stock of yourself?

If you've never had an assessment of your abilities, or your personal style, or your interests and values – especially under the supervision of a trained career coach or counselor – you will be pleasantly surprised and invigorated by the results. You may even find your way to a new and more satisfying career that may or may not build on your legal training. What can you reasonably expect from an assessment of your natural abilities? (Scientists generally agree that some critical abilities are inborn and hard-wired.) A well-structured abilities assessment will tell you:

Do you solve work problems logically or diagnostically, or through some combination of both?

Are you effective in brainstorming sessions? Are you focused and good at follow-through?

- How well do you “read” people and events?
- How quickly can you see and recall changes in your visual field?
- Are you able to remember and reproduce a two-dimensional graphic or design?
- How easily can you remember material presented in printed form, or learn the specialized terminology used by your clients?
- How well can you remember and reproduce a series of non-associated numbers?
- How strong is your ability in the elements of music-tone, pitch, rhythm?
- What is the relative speed & accuracy with which you focus on numbers and letters?
- Do you divide work projects into short segments or do you focus on long-term results?
- How clearly are you able to express your thoughts and concepts to other? In your speech? In your writing?

Let's consider your ability to visualize and manipulate objects in space, an ability which correlates well with specific careers in the law, which has the capacity to absorb people with different ability patterns. If your ability is high, you will be happiest when you represent clients in the fields of architecture or engineering, or in manufacturing. If your ability in Spatial Visualization is low, you will probably excel in the field of mergers and acquisitions, because you are likely to think in abstractions and are not particularly interested in working with solid objects.

Some assessments measure the style with which you respond to people and work environments. If you're a specialist, for example, you will prefer to work alone and develop your "own thing." If you're a generalist, on the other hand, you will prefer to work as part of a group. If you're an extrovert, you will be gregarious, outgoing and uninhibited; if an introvert, you may be introspective, reserved or even distant. Again, a good assessment can tell you how these qualities combine in you. There are many possible and subtle combinations on the generalist-specialist scale. You will find it helpful to know where you fit. The practice of law draws on all possible combinations on the scale, but in different ways. An introvert/specialist may be drawn to tax work, for example, while an extrovert/generalist will prefer the role of firm rain-maker and client manager.

### **Other Factors**

Other factors than natural abilities and personal style can determine whether the firm you have just left was everything you wanted or whether a new focus would be better for you. Your current interests, for example, can be the best guide to the ideal legal career, and there are many assessments of interests in the market. Suppose you have been working hard as a litigator, but your interest in politics has grown through the years and you have learned enough to consider a run for Congress.

What is your best course of action? To look for work as an experienced litigator? Or to spend your time making the friends and contacts a congressional candidate needs? Now that you have a choice based on competing interests, you can add other factors, such as job availability, travel distance, impact on family, compensation, opportunities for advancement, tenure, exposure to the outdoors, etc.

Some test publishers offer assessments of work values. People do not usually catalogue or rank their values, and they are not usually discussed in employment interviews, but ignoring them can be the source of great stress and strain on the job. Suppose that you cherish the work values of Honesty and integrity. Where will you be happier expressing these values – in the role of the white-knight litigator or in the hurly-burly of politics?

However you go about it, a personal reassessment may be vital at this point in your life when everything appears so grim and challenging. For an investment of about \$500, you can purchase every assessment you need and discuss your results with a coach or counselor trained in interpreting assessment results. It's the best investment you can make at this turning point in your life, and it gives you the tools to make a proactive decision toward a fulfilling and satisfying career.

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