



ALTERNATIVE CAREERS: For counselors without a secret job drawer

Susan Gainen, NALP, April 2013

- I. **DEFINITIONS and distinctions**
 - a. Traditional careers.
 - b. Non-traditional careers.
 - c. True alternative careers.
- II. **ADVANTAGES of hiring a law-trained professional**
 - a. IRAC – your BFF.
 - b. Research, writing and analytical skills.
 - c. Ability to construct a coherent narrative from a metaphorical pile of facts (quote from an employer).
 - d. Issue identification and problem solving skills.
 - e. Trained written and oral communicator.
 - f. Interests across a wide range of disciplines.
 - g. **THE EMPLOYEE MANIFESTO**
- III. **IMPEDIMENTS for law-trained professionals approaching a non-traditional career or a career change**
 - a. An alternative career for a lawyer is a traditional career for someone who has the specific training (MBA w/concentration in personnel for an HR Director position).
 - b. Busy HR professionals do not have law schools or lawyers on their primary radar screens when they seek candidates whose specific credentials do not include JD. Law-trained candidates have to seek out employers, use the language of “transferrable skills” to make credential/experience matches, and make the most of their opportunities
 - c. Many people have had difficult dealings with lawyers. Candidates must explain that they want to be team members and that they have skills beyond lawyering. (“I am not a jerk.”)
 - d. Many people do not have clear or correct ideas about what lawyers actually do. When incorrect assumptions about lawyers’ skills and abilities control the hiring process, law-trained candidates have to correct the record by selling themselves, their training, and their skills.
 - e. When an employer seeks an MBA and not a JD, the search may be constructed on the assumption that lawyers lack an MBA’s quantitative skills. Candidates must affirmatively counteract those assumptions.
 - f. Just because you are a lawyer doesn’t mean that you can (nor should you) do everything without additional training. Approaching this search without humility will create impediments.
 - g. Keeping options open as your only strategy is no strategy at all.
 - h. JD: Hammer or Multi-tool?
- IV. **STRATEGIES for overcoming the Impediments**
 - a. Manage FROZEN MOMENT.
 - b. Focus your search
 - i. Use the traditional career development analytical and self-assessment tools to help you focus on an industry, a function and/or a specific job.
 - ii. When you have identified your target, learn everything that you can about it:
 1. Read the literature of the industry. Know its history.
 2. Join professional organizations and go to meetings. Get onto committees. Show interest. Show up.
 3. Use the electronic tools available to you (Linkedin, Twitter, etc.) to begin to connect with professionals in your target.

- c. Review and revise your resume and cover letters
 - i. Consider the job for which you are applying and revise your documents to demonstrate your interest and knowledge in the business, industry or agency. Telepathy is not a job search tool, and if you expect that employers will intuit your interest in their work without something on your resume or cover letter to give them a clue, you waste everyone's time.
 - ii. Learn what "they" are looking for and how you can translate your lawyering skills and experience into something meaningful for a prospective employer.
 - iii. Contact your undergraduate career office or search the web for specific information about specific industries and their resume and other document requirements, skills requirements and career ladders.
- d. Get some experience as a volunteer if necessary.
- e. "Sell." Learn to patiently but enthusiastically explain why a law-trained person is a bonus for the employer.
 - i. If your business and industry knowledge reveals that you are lacking a specific skill or experience, either demonstrate that you have a transferrable skill or offer to take the gap-filling training on your own time and on your own dime.
 - ii. Identify a problem and show what your training brings to the solution.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

NOTE: There is neither an "alternative careers magic bullet" nor an "Alt Careers" app on Harry Potter's wand. Each of these resources is a useful tool for individual job seekers to consult while crafting a personal career path.

[What Can You Do With A Law Degree](#), 5th edition, Deborah Aaron
[The NEW What Can You Do With A Law Degree?](#) Richard & Hanson
[The 6Ps of the Big 3 for Job Seeking JDs](#), Amanda Ellis (for any job seeker)
[Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers](#), 5th Edition, Gary A. Munneke and William D. Henslee
[The \(Un\)Happy Lawyer: A Roadmap to Finding Meaningful Work Outside the Law](#), 2008, Monica Parker
[Guerilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams](#), 2nd ed, Kimm Walton (for any job seeker)

[Alternative career testimonials](#)

[Before and after resume](#)

[Handling tough interview issues](#)

[Alternative Careers Websites](#)

5-steps to an alternative career: [Pass the Baton](#) posts

Step 1: [Feeling trapped?](#)

Step 2: [Research](#)

Step 3: [Purposeful and serendipitous networking](#)

Step 4: [Patience: Shifting Careers is not a "ramen noodles" quick fix](#)

Step 5: [Valuable Transferrable Skills: Step 5 in an Alternative Career Search](#)

[The NALP JD Advantage Portal](#) A critically important tool.

New perspectives in Alternative Careers posts from the Pass the Baton blog: A series of interviews with graduates from 2007-2012 who have made a successful transition to alternative careers.

Consulting <http://www.passthebaton.biz/2012/07/new-perspectives-in-alternative-careers.html>

Law Librarianship: <http://www.passthebaton.biz/2012/07/new-perspectives-in-alternative-careers.html>

Computer Security: <http://www.passthebaton.biz/2012/06/new-perspectives-on-alternative-careers.html>