

Know thyself

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When I was in high school I took one of those career-oriented personality tests that help you decide what kind of job you're suited for. Lawyer was on the list. A few years ago, when I was dissatisfied with my work, I took another test. Apparently I would also make a good funeral home director.

Through school and early careers, most of us dedicate energy to fitting in – whether it's through the way we behave, our dress, our achievements. It's easy to forget our differences – how we learn, how we work best, what energizes us.

If you're wondering if you're on the best career path, maybe it's time to compare your personality with the choices you've made so far. Whether you're a new call, in the practice for a few years, or a lifer, knowing more about your personal preferences can help you make decisions about improving your work situation.

Here are some questions to get you started:

Do you like to work alone or with others? Some lawyers like to work more in teams. Maybe one person takes the lead with the client, while another focuses on research. Others prefer to do all the work themselves. How do you want to work?

Do you like a large workplace with lots of people or an environment with fewer people? It feels very different walking into a firm with 2 lawyers, or 10 or 50 or 100. What would make you feel most at home?

Do you like working on things at the last minute or in advance? Some people thrive on cutting it close to the edge. Others need to finish things well before the deadline. What works best for you?

Is it important to you to have your desk empty at the end of the day or can you walk away leaving a pile of paper? How does it make a difference for you?

Do you like working on a number of projects at once or one big project at a time? Some people need to close the door and focus on one thing at a time. Others like switching between emailing one client, talking on the phone to an associate, and dictating on another file all within minutes. Does your area of practice support your preferences here?

How do you like to start your day? Fast or slow? I had one client for whom mornings were sacred. It was very important to her to start her day slowly and

quietly. It gave her sense of peace in an otherwise hectic day. What works for you?

When do you need to take breaks to eat, get some exercise, and recharge? I used to forget to eat when I got busy. Then I would feel dragged down and wonder why. One of my old bosses was faithful to his one hour lunch break every day. What's important for you?

Do you need time to unwind before you can sleep? How much time? We live in a sleep deprived culture. Too many of us lay awake at night stressed about something or other. Do you have sleep problems? What helps you sleep?

Does being around people mostly give you energy or do you need time alone to recharge? This is the old introvert or extrovert question. Introverts can be lots of fun at a party; they just may need more recovery time! Knowing where you get energy will help you make choices about how to spend your time. Do you need quiet time away from work because it's a busy office full of people? Are you a sole practitioner who needs to be around people more?

The list goes on. What are your personal preferences? Are you living in a way that satisfies them? If not, how can you make changes that will better suit you?

There are lots of resources available if you're interested in more information about how to make choices that are well suited to your personality. Here are a couple of books to get you started: *Comfortable Chaos* by Harvey and Herrild and *Do What You Are* by Tieger and Barron-Tieger.