



Treading a New Path

I HAD A DREAM the other night. I was running on a treadmill. I couldn't tell whether I was inside or out, and although it wasn't dark, I couldn't see anything beyond a few feet. I could hear only a low hum in the background, and the air was still.

The treadmill wasn't going very fast, just a slow jog, one that would wear you out only if you kept it up for a long, long time. Most of the time the incline on the treadmill was elevated only slightly. Every so often it would rise, making it feel like I was jogging up a hill. Thankfully, the hill never lasted very long, and occasionally the incline would go downhill for awhile. No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't step off.

This went on for many years. I tried over and over again to escape from my predicament, without success. Suddenly one day, I made one little hop aside and I was off. For the first time, I could see that I had been, all along, in the middle of a paradise, upon a small hill surrounded by green grass and skies of blue. I could hear birds chirping and children playing. In the distance, I could hear beautiful music playing and could detect the distinctive scent of roses.

I recognize that most of you haven't had this dream, but most of you probably have had that "treadmill" feeling. For me, the treadmill was the way I had been practicing law for many years. If you read my columns, then you already know that I went solo a little over a year ago. My previous practice wasn't terrible, by any means, but the simple reality of overhead meant I had to earn a certain amount each month to keep the doors open. The fact is, I wasn't happy. It didn't seem like working more helped, and working less certainly wasn't the answer. And then I made one little hop aside. In a previous article, I told you how I manage to practice by myself (thereby cutting my overhead drastically), but now I'd like to tell you how changing my practice changed my life.

Talk about stopping to smell the roses. After marrying my wife and having our two kids, this is the best thing that has ever happened to me. I have more time to do things other than work. Very often I get to take my kids to school in the morning, and, when I'm lucky, I get to pick them up, too. I was allowed the latitude to do these things when I was in a traditional practice, but the truth is, I felt guilty whenever I wasn't producing. I'm sure that's a feeling familiar to most of you.

Even though I spend a substantial amount of time being your State Bar president, I'm not rushing around like crazy all the time anymore. I have far more time for my wife and kids—and myself—but I also feel more able to devote time to helping people without being paid. Believe me, the most rewarding thing about being a lawyer is helping people, who really appreciate it when you can spend time meeting their needs without sending them a bill. I have the time to do that now more than ever.

As a result of all this, I'm in a better mood and I'm a better person to be around. I'm thankful for all the people I'm so lucky to know, and now I have a little more time to show it. My family benefits, my clients benefit and I benefit. I think this is what you call a win-win-win situation. Please, if you feel like you're on the treadmill, take a little hop aside. I'm providing the encouragement, and State Bar staff can help provide the support. As always, if I can help in any way let me know at kirk.karman@azbar.org. 🍷

THE MOST REWARDING THING ABOUT BEING A LAWYER IS HELPING PEOPLE, WHO REALLY APPRECIATE IT WHEN YOU CAN SPEND TIME MEETING THEIR NEEDS WITHOUT SENDING THEM A BILL.