

## FOR YOUR PRACTICE

# Lawyers Concerned For Lawyers Career, interrupted

BY DR. JEFF FORTGANG



Dr. Jeff Fortgang

**Q.** My question is not about a clinical problem, per se — I function pretty well, have a good marriage and don't drink much — but about how to address an abrupt interruption in my career, which, now that I think of it, has certainly increased my anxiety level. I have been working at the same nonprofit (funded by grants) for over 20 years, having worked my way up and gotten my law degree along the way. Because of a shakeup that amounted to the ousting of my boss, my position has been eliminated and I'm a bit rusty on the kinds of legal skills that have not been relevant to my administrative role. Certainly I am networking, but I'm not even sure what I am looking for at this point and I find myself going in circles. One

colleague suggested a career counselor; another suggested a career coach. Does **LCL** help with this kind of situation?

**A.** At LCL (which has the advantage of being free to you as a Massachusetts lawyer), we would begin with a wide-ranging review and do some clarifying and brainstorming with you. Then, in a circumstance like yours, we might well refer you to a career coach or a career counselor, either of which might be useful. It turns out that there is considerable variation in approaches, both between and within these two categories of career assistance providers.

To generalize quite broadly, career counselors are more likely to use standardized tests (e.g., of aptitude, interest or style) for assessment, and might help you identify available career paths, optimize your resume and prepare for job interviews. Career coaches might be more likely to help you look inward to reconnect with your personal needs, values and sense of mission; identify obstacles toward moving forward; and offer the kind of encouragement or push that, say, an athletic coach provides.

Some career coaches do a fairly brief interview and follow-up, while others continue with their clients for months. Some begin to resemble therapists, with a series of sessions that respond to where the client finds him or herself; others apply more structured techniques and sequential exercises. We have encountered coaches with particular emphasis on mid-life career change, for example, and others who are more oriented toward younger or more entrepreneurial individuals. Some coaches are geared toward telephonic sessions that can last as little as 15 minutes.



Most of the career consultants to whom LCL refers are well acquainted with careers in law (including via their own former work lives). There is, of course, no guarantee of successful results, but most people will put forth a more persistent effort in finding a job or reconfiguring their careers if they don't go it alone. Counselors and coaches also vary in how much they charge and how much is paid in advance. While we find it reasonable when they request prepayment for several hours as a kind of retainer, we have not been inclined to refer to those who ask for large sums in advance.

Either burnout or unanticipated changes in work status like yours can lead to a kind of stunned inertia or immobilizing anxiety. Connecting with LCL and with a good career coach or counselor can be an important part of getting back in motion and developing a new career plan. ■

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**Dr. Jeff Fortgang is a licensed psychologist and licensed alcohol and drug counselor on staff at Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Massachusetts, where he and his colleagues provide confidential consultation to lawyers and law students, and offer presentations on subjects related to the lives of lawyers. Q&A questions are either actual letters/emails or paraphrased and disguised concerns expressed by individuals seeking LCL's assistance. Questions may be emailed to [DrJeff@LCLMA.org](mailto:DrJeff@LCLMA.org).**