

**DIFFERENTIATING LESSONS:  
THE ELEMENTS OF BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL AND SATISFYING CAREER  
FROM 7/9/07 TALK BY DEBRA SNIDER**

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*Success isn't success if it doesn't make you happy.*

- ✓ This is your career and your life – the only definition of success that matters is your definition
- ✓ Sometimes it's hard to identify your priorities with all the noise
  - Don't get stuck with or limited by "should" – always ask *Whose rules are these? Why? Why not?*
  - As yourself what makes you happy, what inspires you
  - Flip a coin to trick yourself into knowing what you care about
- ✓ Get your choices very clear in your mind, get comfortable with them, and get on with things
- ✓ If you gather info and make honest decisions in the framework of your personal goals and priorities, tomorrow will take care of itself
- ✓ Planning becomes much easier once you realize it's not about any particular destination, but rather about the journey – how you feel and build skills and contribute along the way
- ✓ Stay open to redefinition, be flexible, and give yourself a break – times will change and so will you
- ✓ Don't sacrifice the good in a vain quest for the perfect – aim for improvement, not perfection, and understand that setbacks are a reason to try differently, not a reason to give up

*Adopt a "suit yourself" approach to measuring career satisfaction.*

- ✓ Satisfaction is an ongoing thing, a process, a way of feeling, a pursuit – it's not the means to an end, it **is** the end and it is what you should prioritize
  - Personal success is an outcome – the goal is day-to-day contentment and satisfaction at work
- ✓ Success defined as climbing the corporate or law firm ladder is two-sided: lots of perks, but also lots of responsibility. You have to really care about the organization and other people to make it work
- ✓ You don't get to define what organizations perceive as valuable, but you do get to define what makes you happy and what you love to do (and are therefore probably good at) – it's their field, but you can absolutely play your game
- ✓ Challenge is to see that it's not worth it if it doesn't work for you, but this is an argument for figuring out how it **can** work for you, not an argument for giving up, being miserable or opting out
- ✓ You won't get what you don't ask for – so know what you want and ask for it

*Once you're clear on what you want, like, and can add value to, focus on what the organization perceives as valuable.*

- ✓ Get yourself in positions where you believe that what you've set out to do can be done, that you can do it, and that it will add value
- ✓ Like people, organizations have personalities, core values, structure – recognize this and choose roles where the organizational realities work **for** you instead of against you
  - Don't take an overly narrow view – you may not look or feel the part, but you can still add value; it's simply a matter of figuring out how
  - Diversity = differentiation and differentiation = competitive advantage
- ✓ Work is a social activity – to succeed yourself, you need other people to succeed and flourish
  - In organizational context, best way to get what you want is to help colleagues, bosses, and clients get what they want
    - ✓ Remember that clients assume technical expertise – what will distinguish you is speed, reliability, responsiveness, and civility
- ✓ If you trust other people and give them the gifts of your confidence and support, they will achieve at a level that will astonish you – and, more importantly, that will astonish **them** – and they will support you
  - Delegating and tapping into the power, creativity and hard work of other people is far more meaningful and powerful than only shining on your own
  - Pay particular attention to creating opportunities for other women and helping other women succeed
- ✓ Because times change and you will change over time, you want to be nimble and able to move – but you also want to leave every place you work better than you found it
- ✓ You'll always have more freedom if you seek to build the capabilities of the organization rather than doing it all yourself – i.e., institutionalize talent

*Get organized and stay organized – focus on what matters most.*

- ✓ Key to doing it all: Clear priorities and A+ org skills
- ✓ Be the kind of person you want to be relative to responsiveness, courtesy and generosity
  - Being busy is not an excuse for being unresponsive and inconsiderate
  - Organizational skills and time management aren't chores – they are necessities that will make your life better and easier
  - They are also competitive advantages
- ✓ Be organized, too, in terms of coordinating your personal and professional lives and responsibilities – this will let you be strategic as well as tactical
- ✓ **Be** strategic as well as tactical – don't get bogged down in paperwork or seem to focus only on performance
  - Strategic work is not only more fun, it's more valued in every organization
  - Good work is never enough to get you to the finish line – being effective is more important than being hard-working, and *how* you accomplish things and go about publicizing your accomplishments is just as important as what you accomplish

*There isn't time for two personalities, so be who you are and look to become invaluable.*

- ✓ Scope out the rules of the game and understand why and how you can add value on your terms
- ✓ Build relationships and show that you get that building relationships and adding value are:
  - The keys to being successful and valued
  - Just as important as hard work and technical expertise
- ✓ Be a high impact performer – offer unique value and really earn your bonus, not just your base pay
  - Act like a player, not a spectator, and put some real skin in the game
  - Recognize that you get what you give
- ✓ Remember that differentiation is the name of the game for success – your differences are advantages, not disadvantages – view and treat them accordingly

*Demonstrate leadership every chance you get.*

- ✓ People who act like leaders feel more empowered, more positive, more effective and more satisfied
- ✓ Leadership has very little to do with hierarchy, age, job position, experience or personality – we all have or can develop followers
  - People interested in what we think and who will be influenced by our words and actions
  - People we want to see succeed and who want to see us succeed
  - People who share our desire to contribute to a work environment that's fun and satisfying vs. depressing or awful
- ✓ Some lead by ideas, some by energizing groups, some by running in front of the pack, some by coaching from behind the scenes – but everyone has frequent chances to:
  - Make things better and more fun
  - Commit to the success of others
  - Fix processes
  - Inspire others to want to come to work
  - Contribute to strong teamwork, strong culture, strong organization
- ✓ Leadership behaviors add unique value – demonstrate them and you'll be happier and more involved, you'll get more money and recognition, and your colleagues will appreciate you more
- ✓ Choosing to be a leader is infinitely more gratifying than choosing to consider yourself powerless and standing idly by or being miserable
- ✓ This kind of leadership is infectious – it leads to groups where everyone finds a way to contribute and feels valued, energized, capable and productive