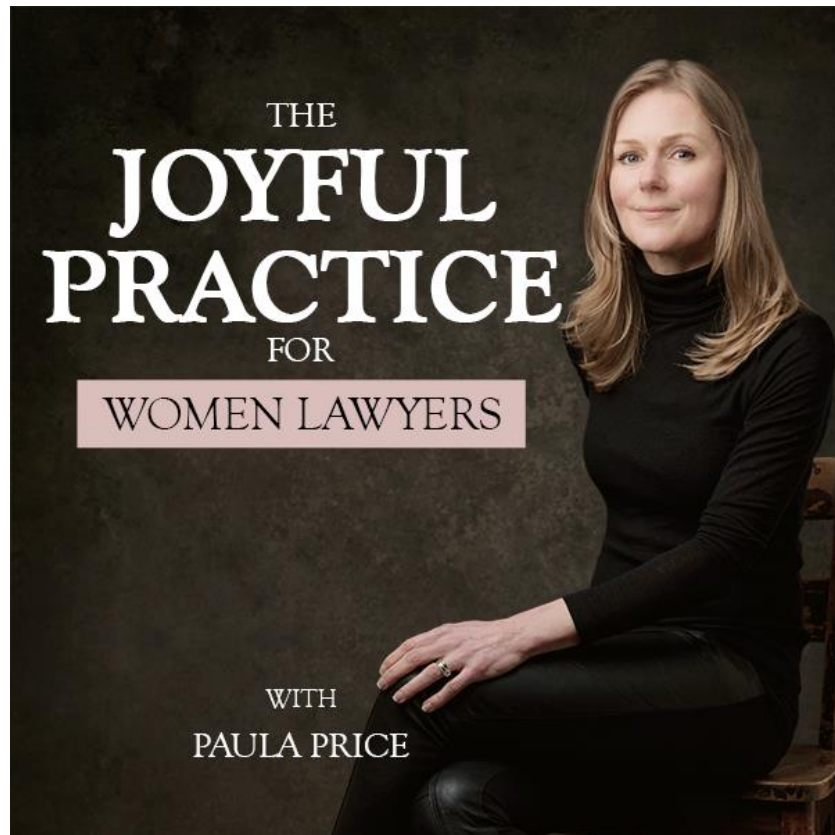


Ep #52: Strategic Career Planning with Beth Mountford



Full Episode Transcript

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Paula Price

[The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers](#) with Paula Price

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You're listening to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast episode number 52.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, lawyer turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. Join me every week for a break from the hustle so we can focus on you, what you truly want, and how you can create it.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Hello, everybody. Welcome back to the podcast. It is such a pleasure to have you here. I hope you're having a fabulous week. For anybody who's joining for the first time, I'm delighted to have you. My name is Paula Price, and I'm the host of this podcast. You picked a great episode to start out with because today I have the pleasure of interviewing Beth Mountford who is a lawyer turned legal recruiter with Smith Legal Search. Beth and I talk about all things strategic career planning. So if that's the topic that resonates with you, you are in the right place.

Now before we dive into the episode, there are just a couple of things I wanted to touch on. Number one, a big thank you to all of you who are tuning in. Particularly a big thank you to everyone who has reached out to me, whether it's through email, through LinkedIn, through the contact form on my website. I just love hearing from you. It's amazing to me how there are listeners across the globe who are reaching out and telling me how much they're enjoying the podcast.

I just wanted to say thank you and keep doing that, whether you're just wanting to connect and say hello or if you have questions or if you want my

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support through coaching. By all means, please feel free to connect with me. I would love to hear from you.

The second thing I wanted to mention is that I would love your help in helping to build this community. You can do that in two ways. Number one, I would invite you to share this podcast with your colleagues, with your friends, with anybody in your professional network who you think would benefit from the messages that we share in this podcast, the interviews that we have.

Because really what we're doing here is building connections and community among a group of professional women who are likeminded, who are ambitious high achievers, who are also very heart centered and impact oriented. And I just love having us all come together in this way. So if you would share news of the podcast, that would be fabulous. Pick an episode that really resonated with you. Maybe it's today's episode, and please spread the word.

The second thing I would love for you to do would be to rate and review the podcast wherever it is you download your podcast. The reason that this is important is that there's an algorithm that hosts these podcasts. When they have ratings and reviews, they become more visible to the people that are trying to find them. So, again, that will help us build our community.

So if you would please share news of the podcast, rate and review the podcast that will really help us build our community. That, of course, is wonderful for all of us. So with that, my friends, I am going to drop us into my interview with Beth. I'm going to say thank you again for joining this week. I look forward to reconnecting next week. Bye for now.

Paula: Hi, everybody. It's Paula Price. I'm excited to be introducing our very special guests this week. Her name is Beth Mountford. Beth is a legal

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recruiter with Smith Legal Search, and she is a former lawyer. Welcome Beth.

Beth: Thank you.

Paula: Beth, I am so excited to have you here today. I know all of our listeners are excited to have you here today. I get a lot of questions from lawyers who are looking to shift in terms of their roles. So I just think you're the perfect person to talk about that. I'd love to know before we jump in a little bit more about you and your background and your work as a recruiter.

Beth: Yeah. So first of all, thank you so much for having me on the podcast today. I'm very excited to be here.

Paula: Oh, thank you for being here.

Beth: Yeah, I'm really looking forward to this discussion. So a little bit about me. As you said, I am a recruiter with Smith Legal Search, and I help manage our Toronto office. So through my work as a recruiter, I help lawyers navigate important career decisions whether that is making a lateral move across Bay Street, understanding how, when, and where to go in-house, or whether that's transitioning to a new market. So say you want to make a move from Toronto to Vancouver, Vancouver to Toronto or go to the U.S. or move back home to Canada. That's what I help lawyers navigate.

Prior to recruiting, as you mentioned, I was a lawyer myself. So I am a 2018 call in Ontario. I'm also a McGill Law grad. I've practiced with both boutique and national firms on Bay Street. So, when it comes to recruiting, I very much understand the dynamics at play for lawyers, especially junior lawyers who are in the three to five year range who are trying to assess their career goals.

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I am also very active in the mindfulness, mental health, and wellness space within the profession. I'm also a certified coach, a breathwork facilitator. That really ties into my work as a recruiter because at Smith Legal Search, we take a very people focused, long term perspective on recruitment.

What I mean by that is that we really focus on getting to know people, understanding their legal practice, and who they are as human beings, including their priorities in and outside of the office so that we can help lawyers really think about the longer term strategy and make very intentional decisions about where they want to go with their careers and ultimately, their lives.

Paula: Wow, Beth, this is so fabulous. I actually didn't know that you're a McGill law grad. So am I.

Beth: Okay, I did know that. I think that was one of the reasons why I reached out to you on LinkedIn is because we have that in common. Yeah.

Paula: That is wild. I didn't know. The rest of it I was familiar with, and I think it's so interesting to hear your story. I really love the approach that you are taking. I think for that three to five year lawyer, especially, there are so many questions. I'm so glad we have this opportunity to get deeper into that.

My next question for you, Beth, is what it is that drew you into legal recruiting. Before I drop into that, I just wanted to say you and I found each other on LinkedIn because we have these common interests, right, in terms of the mindfulness and the coaching and lawyer professional development. So it's just really neat we were able to connect that way, and now here we are recording this podcast episode together. So sorry, that was a bit of a detour. What is it that drew you from the practice of law into the recruitment space?

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Beth: Yeah, so you know it's funny because I speak with a lot of lawyers, my friends included, who were drawn to law or at least inspired by the movie *Legally Blonde*. For me, I love Reese Witherspoon. I love Elle Woods, but I was more drawn to Mila Kunis's character Jamie in *Friends with Benefits* who was an executive headhunter in the movie.

To give a bit more of a serious answer though, for me, legal recruiting is really about showing lawyers that they have agency, that they have choice and control over their careers. My primary goal is really to shine a light to give lawyers as much visibility on their options as possible so that they can make really informed and intentional decisions about where they want to go. So the hook for me with recruiting is really it comes down to the human component of it.

Paula: I love what you just said there, Beth, about agency because I think that is an area where for a lot of lawyers, myself included, we don't always see what options are available to us. I speak with lawyers regularly who see themselves as on a certain path and really not knowing what else is out there.

So I love how you've described this as shining a light on what else is available, and really helping lawyers take that locus of control, that locus of power and bring it back to themselves in terms of the decision making that they engage with when it comes to their careers. I'd love to know going from practice to recruiting, how working as a recruiter has influenced your impression of the legal profession and what it means to be a lawyer.

Beth: Yeah, so it's really interesting that you just said that a lot of lawyers see themselves on a certain path. For me, part of the reason that I decided to transition from practicing law into legal recruiting is that when I looked around me at my firm, I couldn't see myself in the shoes of the senior associates or the partners that I worked with. While we got along so well on

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a personal level and I had so much respect for their own journeys and their own careers, it just didn't resonate with me in terms of where I wanted to go personally.

Now, like going back to answer your question, recruiting has really refreshed my perspective on the legal profession because I speak with so many lawyers who maintain a very broad range of practices. Whether that's the area of law that they practice or the type of work that they do on a day to day or how they manage to structure their practice to harmonize their work with the more personal aspects of their lives.

So through speaking with so many different lawyers, it's really opened my eyes to all of the ways in which you can practice law or use a law degree and all of the really interesting legal practices that you can carve out for yourself to really align with what it is that matters most to you.

So working as a recruiter, again, like really opened my eyes in terms of where you can take your career and made me realize that when I was making the decision, I saw myself in a box, and I wasn't aware of the range of options that were available to me. So, again, like that is one of the things that I enjoy most about recruiting is that I can shine light on those options, help increase visibility for lawyers who may be grappling with that decision so that they can, at the end of the day, make a choice that is best for them.

Paula: It's so interesting. I have found exactly the same thing since leaving the more traditional practice of law. I worked at a large firm for most of my legal career. I didn't realize just how many other ways there were that lawyers could practice law. There's so many options. Whether it's in-house or starting your own firm or practicing in just a very unusual way. Do you have any examples that come to mind in terms of different ways that you've seen lawyers practice that you've thought, "Oh, that's really unique or interesting?"

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Beth: Yeah. So I started my career in family law, and it's been really interesting because over time I've watched some of my friends who stuck within that practice area carve out their own practices where maybe they don't enjoy litigation. So they create a practice that is really mediation, negotiation, collaborative law focused.

Or maybe it's that they don't enjoy dealing with clients in the client management aspect. So they've become research associates within their firms, and that's kind of where their skill set is and their talent and their expertise is, and they have a mostly like research and writing based practice.

Also, there are many lawyers who choose to, as you said, start your own firm or become a freelance lawyer. So there's a lot of different ways that you can structure your practice. Even within a firm in terms of there are different ways that you can structure your billable targets, your compensation to allow you to create a practice that really fits into the life that you want and the pace at which you would like to work.

Paula: Yeah, so true. I think the impact of COVID, one of them at least, is that I've seen a lot more lawyers who are able to take that agency and carve out something that is more suitable to them, right, how you describe, right. It's something that works for them professionally and also allows them to have other components of their life more in balance.

So I think it's a really neat evolution of the practice. I think it's also great for lawyers to know that this is out there, other people are doing it, and that can inspire them to think about what would suit them best as well. So I know our listeners, their wheels are turning.

Beth, so you and I met on LinkedIn. I think one of the earliest posts that I saw, although I think I've seen many, but this one kind of stands out and

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stood out is you've got a LinkedIn post. It starts out with you talking about how 57% of women leave practice in their first five years. That post has 1,800 likes. It may have more because I took my notes a few days ago. 659 comments and 27 shares. So I wanted to ask you about that post. So I've got a few questions. The first question is, were you surprised by the response that you got?

Beth: Yes and no. So I was very surprised with how far that post went. So the level of engagement on the post. That was by far greater than anything that I've shared in the past. However, I wasn't surprised that it resonated with so many lawyers, both women and men who were considering leaving the profession or—And, again, maybe not leaving the profession because even when I talk about myself, I prefer to say that I chose to stop practicing law. I'm still as a recruiter, of course, very active within--.

Paula: Absolutely. Me too.

Beth: Yeah, within the profession. I think one of the things that I spoke about a lot in the post was the emotional aspect of that decision and really navigating what that meant for me in terms of how I saw myself and my own identity because, again, becoming a lawyer it's a long process. There's a lot of work that goes into it, and it takes up a good portion of your life up to that point. So to then decide that maybe it's not the path you want to be on raises a lot of questions about identity. I think that that resonated with a lot of lawyers who are grappling with that decision.

Paula: Absolutely. I think it's having your identity as a lawyer is... I know when I left law like as a practicing lawyer, that was one of the things that I struggled with the most is stepping out of being a lawyer into some other as yet undefined role. What was your experience of leaving the law? I say leaving the law as in, as you described it.

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Beth: Yeah, stop practicing. Yeah. So again, for me and I'm sure I'm not alone with like in this, the decision, it was an emotional roller coaster is how I would describe it. It brought to light a lot of personal questions about my core values and my identity. So how I saw myself and my core beliefs around who I was. As I mentioned before, like the road to becoming a lawyer is long. It takes a lot of time, a lot of grit, and it can really test your self-esteem and self-worth.

So when I decided to stop practicing, I worried a lot about what other people would think. Whether there would be judgment, questions around was I making the wrong decision? Was it just that I wasn't good enough or I couldn't like—In the legal profession especially when you're just starting, I think there's a tendency to kind of glamorize the, I don't want to say hard work, but it's like glamorize the intensity of it. So I worried that I would be seen as someone who just couldn't keep up.

What I came to realize was that most of my fears were fears around judgment and what other people would think were actually a reflection of the internal conflict and the self-judgment that I was holding on to against myself around that decision. So without getting too far down the rabbit hole of the details, it was a time where I had to put in a lot of self-reflection and be radically honest with myself about who I was, where I wanted to go with my life, and how I saw myself.

So through that journey, again, like a lot of self-reflection, and also seeking support from coaches, from mentors, other lawyers who had been through the process. So it was a journey but one that ultimately led me to where I am today.

Paula: I'm so glad because here we are. Beth, I have to say that piece about the self-reflection, the self-judgment, the self-concept, I think that is such a compelling piece of our evolution really as humans, as lawyers, as

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professionals. I don't think we are always conscious of the way that our internal dialogue shapes how we feel.

I think for so many lawyers, especially in a culture, as you described, where that work ethic and if you're in a culture with billable hours, there's the billable hours component to it. I think there's so much value that we can place as a profession and also in ourselves, right, on how hard are we working.

I think there's the judgment that we have that is our own judgment of ourselves and then there may be the judgment that other people have. They may not, but we internalize it. I think that can be a real struggle for lawyers, for professionals who are telling themselves effectively, I should be working harder. I should do this. I should do all these things, even when it comes at the cost of maybe doing something differently that would work better for them.

So I just appreciate that you highlighted that because I think so many of us and likely many people who are listening may see that in themselves, right. That there's something that they think other people are thinking but really it's us thinking about it and not truly being aware that that's what's going on. So.

Beth: Exactly. I also think like going back to the piece of if there is judgment coming from an outside party or from someone else being able to see that as not a reflection of you, but more of a projection of what's going on within them.

So I think for me part of it was like taking ownership of my own thoughts and beliefs, and also creating that boundary to say that at the end of the day, it's really my perspective of myself that matters and how I feel about the decisions that I'm making about my own life. If I'm happy and confident

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in those, then that's going to be seen by those around me and the people that truly care about my like wellbeing and long term success are going to see that.

Paula: Yeah, I think you've put it so beautifully Beth. Thank you. What would you recommend for anyone who's thinking about leaving law?

Beth: So it's funny because I have this conversation all the time. I was just speaking with a junior lawyer who was grappling with this decision. What I often say is take the time to be intentional and also understand that the best time to think about major career decisions is when you are in control, not when you are out of control. I'm going to say that again because it is very important to like drive that one home. The best time to think about major career decisions is when you're in control, not when you're out of control.

Because it's very easy to get caught up in the moment and to think about the next month in front of you, especially if you're in the first few years of your practice where there is a steep learning curve. It feels overwhelming. You're just trying to keep your head above water. Or you're in a very challenging work environment dealing with some interesting personalities where you think that the only option is to exit the profession.

So what I say to you is that if you find yourself in a place where you feel like you're out of control, get your ship to a safe harbor. Give yourself this space to feel safe and get back in control of really of your nervous system and your internal world so that you can avoid making an emotional decision. Because what you want to do is you want to be in a place where you are able to look beyond the present and the next month. You want to be able to look at where you want to go in your life so that in 5/10 years from now, you can look back and say yes, I made the right decision.

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So if you are someone who is thinking okay, I want to stop practicing. I want to make a move. Really take time to think about it on a granular level and be very specific about why is it that you're looking to make that move? What are the other options available to you? What is it that you're trying to move away from and what are you trying to move towards? Really take your time to make that decision so that you're making it from a place where, again, you're in control and you're looking towards the longer term.

Paula: Yeah, that is so well put. A couple of thoughts here. I like that idea of finding your way to a safe harbor before making a decision. It reminds me of that expression, I think it's you don't want to build your roof when it's raining. You want to build your roof when it's sunny outside. It's that kind of idea comes to mind.

The second one is more of a question. When you talk about the safe harbor, do you mean—Like let's say you're at a firm. You're unhappy. It's stressful because you've got trials that you're dealing with or closings that you're dealing with. So you've got that kind of day to day. Maybe there's a personality that you're working with where it's just not working out very well. Is the safe harbor, is that something that you find where you are? Or is that going to another firm or organization and finding the safe harbor over there? Does it kind of depend on the situation?

Beth: That's a really good question. I'm glad you asked because it depends. It depends on the person and the situation. I think that this is where it can be really great to seek support and ask for help. Because a lot of the times when you're in that place of fight or flight or you feel unsafe, one of the things, and I'm sure that those listening can relate, is that we often feel like we're alone in it and that no one else has gone through it before.

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So getting yourself, getting your ship to a safe harbor, sometimes that will look like seeking support, learning how to manage your nervous system, like manage your stress levels and your time. That could be within the firm that you're in. Sometimes though there are cases where you're in a toxic environment and the best decision that you can make is to move firms and to change that environment.

Again, like this is where I think it becomes very helpful to know that you're not alone. There are many resources available in terms of, I know that the Law Society has a mentorship program. There are coaches, such as yourself, legal recruiters who have a good sense of how to strategically plan your career and make the move.

So I think that one of the things that I would recommend is if you find yourself in that place where you feel like you're at risk of making a move because you've reached your breaking point is try and reflect on okay, what is it that is pushing me out of the situation? Are there supports or people that I can reach out to that are going to be able to kind of reflect the situation back to me? Because it can be really hard when you're caught up in it.

Paula: I think the advice that you're sharing is so valuable Beth. I really appreciate what you're saying. I think this is going to land with a lot of people, especially those who are just experiencing like the discomfort and the daily stress of being in a situation where you know you're not happy, but you don't necessarily know what the next right step is. So I appreciate this a lot. Question for you. This comes up with lawyers that I speak with. How do you know if private practice isn't right for you, or if you're just not at the right firm?

Beth: It's a good question. This one also comes up for me a lot. I was speaking with I believe it was a fourth year call at a seven sister about this

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last week. Part of that conversation was really walking through the specifics, and, again, getting very granular about what is it that you enjoy about your practice now? What is it that's missing? What would you like to move towards?

So that once you have that clear picture. Like I say this all the time. If I could wave a magic wand over your practice, what would that look like to you? When you can create that really clear picture, then you can start to get a sense of whether it's private practice or whether it's the firm.

So for example, if you're a litigator billing 2,100 plus hours, you really enjoy thinking on your feet, you enjoy being in the courtroom, but you're looking for a little bit less intensity, a lot of—Like one is that in-house litigation roles are few and far between, but two, like the answer might actually be that instead of leaving private practice to go in-house, maybe you want to leave the big full service firm and go to a boutique where you're going to be doing similar caliber of work.

You're still going to be in court thinking on your feet and have that level of engagement or that dynamic nature to your practice, but maybe you're in a place where the billable target is closer to 1,400 than 2,100. Then that creates a lot of time, again, like more agency or the feeling of agency over your practice in your life. Maybe that's actually what you're looking for.

So, again, to go back, it's really about taking the time to reflect and getting very specific on what is it that I enjoy? What's missing? What do I want to move towards? Where are the gaps? Are those gaps going to be filled by leaving private practice or are those gaps going to be better filled by moving to a firm that is perhaps a better fit?

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Paula: That's really helpful. Thank you. What do you recommend—If a lawyer knows that they want to go in-house, what would you recommend to them?

Beth: This is a good one. I think the narrative that we're often sold, especially as law students, as junior lawyers, is that oh, I'll spend three to five years in private practice, and then I'll go in-house and the grass is going to be greener.

So what I like to say is like I'm going to ask you. If I were to ask what does going in-house look like to you? Oftentimes people don't know. It's like I don't know. I just assumed that it'll be like more nine to five. So I think the thing is like in-house means a lot of different things to different people.

So if you say you want to go in-house, what does that mean to you? Because once you can identify what that means to you, then you can start to look at the types of in-house roles, whether that's a larger company where you're going to be on a more siloed legal team, or a smaller startup where you're kind of going to be the go to person for everything legal. Or whether you want to do more like regulatory or compliance based roles. Like there are so many different things when you go in-house.

So what does that look like for you? Because once you're able to plant your flag of where you want to go then you can work backwards and start to figure out okay, what are the steps that I need to get to where I ultimately want to be?

Paula: I love that. There is no one size fits all when it comes to in-house. I think you've really nailed that on the head. Love it. So what do you recommend? Once you've planted your flag and you know where you want to go, what do you recommend in terms of being strategic in planning out your career?

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Beth: Yeah, so first getting a clearer picture of like where do I want to go? Sometimes, too, I guess the other thing I will say is that I think some of us get caught up in the idea of oh I need to plant my flag and then I can never move it again. Right? So it's you can plant that flag where do you want to be within—Like break it down. Like where do you want to be within the next five years and then work backwards from there. Again, in terms of being strategic in your planning? I'll say it again. Make decisions when you're in control not when you're out of control.

Paula: This is the takeaway, my friends.

Beth: This is the takeaway. Yeah, because, again, it's very easy to get caught up in the moment. To go back to in-house. If you decide that you want to plant your flag in an in-house position, what I would recommend doing is starting to look at okay if these are the types of companies that I want to go into, A, how can I start networking and business development?

B, can I look at the job postings? What are the criteria that they're looking for? What is my current experience? How does that match up? Are there gaps? How can I start to build out my experience so that when the time comes that I am ready to make that move, I'm going to be a star candidate? That will help me stand out.

So it's all about, again, like taking the time to really reflect on where you want to be. Which, as lawyers, we're often not taught. Like, for us, we've followed a very linear path where the next milestone is laid out in front of you. So there are some lawyers who always wanted to be a lawyer, and they've known from a very young age.

Then there are others where you go to law school because you had strong academic performance in undergrad, and you're kind of like well, I have a general arts degree. What am I going to do next? So you go to law school,

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then you graduate law school, you article, you write the bar, you get hired back, you find your first role.

Then you get there, and it's kind of like okay. Well, now the next milestone, if you want to be partner, that's oh like potentially 8/10 years away. So there's a lot. You've been on that path for so long you're not really used to reflecting on okay, what is it that I actually want? What is it that's important to me? Then how do I take steps to get there?

Paula: I think that's so powerful, Beth. The two key points that resonate really strongly with me is number one, how far ahead are you looking? As you said, you can be looking out five years. It doesn't have to be 20 years. Just making that timeframe something that's a little bit more tangible, a little bit easier to conceive of, takes a lot of pressure off, I think, for that planning, right.

I think that second piece that you talked about. I mean you talked about probably more than two points, but the one that really stuck with me is, again, that shifting so that you're being really intentional as opposed to looking to the external cues. Which I find with as you've described law school, the bar exam, that the benchmarks are set out, and your job is to achieve them.

Whereas when you're being more strategic and intentional in your career planning, you are the one who's deciding what those benchmarks are. Whether it's looking at okay, here's where I want to go. I want to go in-house, and these are the skills I'm going to need, the contacts I'm going to need. How do I go about getting those? Again, it's just bringing that decision making back into focus. I think you mentioned it's not taught to us, right. It's just something that we have to develop.

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So I encourage everyone who is whether or not you want to leave your job to really be intentional about where you want your career to go. Then start setting yourself up so that you get to where you want to be.

Beth: Another thing that I will say too is that, again, we're talking a lot about achieving the external milestones. So when you're thinking about where you want your career to go, it's okay if that goal is I want to make partner. Or it's okay if that goal is I want to be GC at X, Y, Z company.

The question then that I would encourage you to ask is well why? Like what is the feeling that I'm chasing? What is the internal state that I'm actually looking for with that? Because that will also give you guidance in terms of well, what are your core values as a person, not necessarily just as a lawyer?

Then, again, with that information, you can start to see okay, well, is this external milestone or this flag that I'm planting truly going to bring me the feelings that I expect? Like, is it truly aligned with what I want to do? Or am I just chasing this because I feel like that's what I need to be seen or perceived as successful?

Paula: I think that's such an excellent point. So my next question for you, Beth, I think we've set ourselves up really nicely for it because on the one hand there's the strategy, right? There's the planning. There's the execution.

On the other hand, there's a quote that you shared with me. We spoke a few weeks ago, and it really resonated with me. You said, "What is meant for you cannot miss you." Which I just love. I'll say it again. What is meant for you cannot miss you. I'd love to know for you how has that played out in your career?

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Beth: Yes. So as lawyers, I believe that many of us have a tendency to be perfectionists. We often fear failure or worry that we're going to make a decision and regret it later. For me gently reminding myself that what is meant for me cannot miss me has in many circumstances given me the strength and the confidence to step beyond my comfort zone knowing that even if I slip, fall, or take a detour, I will ultimately end up exactly where I need to be and exactly where I'm meant to be.

So even in times that I've fallen and I have maybe failed in some sense of the word, it has also given me the grace to respond and to move forward with a lot more self-compassion and kindness towards myself and understanding that there will be ups and downs in my journey. But at the end of the day, as long as I have the, again, like the strength, the bravery, the confidence to continue moving forward, what is meant for me will not miss me. Like you cannot mess it up.

Paula: Yeah, I just love that Beth. It reminds me of the analogy to an airplane. I gather that when airplanes are going from destination A to destination B, they actually travel in more of a zigzag, kind of like a sailboat that's tacking from side to side. So the takeaway is that you can be traveling in the wrong direction 90% of the time, but so long as you're moving forward and course correcting as you go, you will make it to your destination. So that's kind of how I see it in my mind's eye when we talk about finding what's meant for you. So I just love that.

Moving into a slightly different topic. I know for a lot of lawyers and junior lawyers especially the business development piece is really important, but perhaps daunting and a bit mysterious. What's important about business development for lawyers, especially the junior lawyers? What would you recommend for lawyers who don't really know where to start?

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Beth: It's a good question and, yeah, one that I get from a lot of junior lawyers. My general advice on this one is that a lot of lawyers feel like okay, I'm already working around the clock. Like when do I have time to fit this in? So, again, it's very easy to focus on like the next day, the next week in front of you as opposed to taking a step back.

What I like to say is okay so if you're billing say 1,800 hours in a year, take 50 of those billable hours like invest them into business development. Start attending conferences, writing articles, speaking on panels, get curious, get interested and involved in the things that, again, are of interest to you. Start building those relationships and making connections because what's going to start to happen is six months from now that conference that you attended might turn into a client of your own.

A year or two from now, it might turn into an in-house opportunity. You never know where those relationships are going to come from. So again, it's not necessarily about adding more to your plate. It's just being more intentional and strategic about how you're spending your time.

Paula: Yeah, I love that Beth. I get asked questions about business development too. What do I do in a pandemic? What do I do if I'm introverted? I think there's a lot of opportunities. I don't think that the relationship building in particular has to be particularly onerous.

I think it's as simple as seeing a conference, for example, and sending an email to one of the presenters to say you really enjoyed what they did. Or if you're able to help somebody, if somebody approaches you, and they have a question, being able to provide them with value. I think there's so many opportunities just little ones all along the road that maybe don't take a huge amount of time.

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Maybe you're not having a huge, long connection with somebody, but you're slowly but surely building up your network. I say that thinking I don't want it to sound calculated, but you are. You're building up a web of relationships, which you never know what they will turn into several years down the road.

Your colleague, Warren Smith, I met him in it must have in 2004. I just remember him being really helpful to me. He provided me with some names of people that I could follow up with at a time when that was really, really helpful for me. I always think of Warren in that way, right? That he's just this guy who helped me out. So that was a while ago now. We're getting close to 20 years. So at the beginning, it may seem like these small steps, but it can really flourish over time. So I really appreciate you sharing that.

Beth: Yeah. I also think too is like it can be fine. Like even for the two of us. We connected on LinkedIn and we have a lot of common interests that we talk about outside of necessarily the work that we do. But through that, there comes a lot of ideas and potential like collaborations. So it's you never know where things are going to go.

The other piece that I will add now that you mentioned Warren because Warren and I talk about this all the time is to start checking in with people. Like if you take some time out of your day to check in, ask people how it's going, is there any way that I can help? This is a lot of what like our approach to recruitment is that we really focus on building a long term relationship. It's, again, it's not so much about what you say, but it's about how you made the other person feel and how they feel in your presence and just building that long term connection. Because, again, as you said, you never know where things could go 5/10/20 years down the road.

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Paula: Absolutely. The one thing I'll add to that too is that I find what's really neat about having a broad network of professionals is that you are then able to put other people in contact with each other. So person A has this obscure thing they're looking for, and you're able to say, "Oh, well, I know person B, who could probably help you with that. Then you're able to put them in contact, and then they formed their own connection. So there's just a lot to be said I think about kind of the magic that can arise from just the simple seeds that you're planting along the way.

So as you mentioned, we met on LinkedIn, and it's been incredible. Even having this conversation, I'm now thinking of all these new things I'm learning about you that I'm excited to follow up on in the future. So love it. Thank you. Now, Beth going back to your LinkedIn profile. You're going to have so much traffic looking up all these fantastic posts, but you just ran the Boston Marathon, which is amazing. Congratulations.

Beth: Thank you.

Paula: Love it. You posted about it on LinkedIn. So I was going to ask you how you compared running that Boston Marathon to going through the recruitment process. I would venture to any other sort of transition that you might be going through.

Beth: Yes. So what I will say is that there's a lot that goes on to prepare for running a marathon. So crossing the finish line at 42.2 kilometers is only a snapshot of your journey. There's a lot that goes in before you can even toe the start line. I think that that comes back to recruitment because when you are consistent not only in your belief of success or landing where you want to be, but also in putting in the action to get yourself there, that's where you find the success. Like that's where the results come.

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So it goes back to the idea that consistency compounded is what leads to results. So same as marathon training where there are going to be good days and bad days. There will be days when you don't run as fast as you want to, but it's all part of the training process. It really comes back to showing up, believing in yourself, putting in the work, and knowing that when you are consistent, you are ultimately going to get across that finish line.

Paula: Such a good lesson. I think you said something in your post about the last eight kilometers or something or the last eight something. What was that?

Beth: Yeah. So comparing it to working with a recruiter, what I was saying is that working with a recruiter is like running a marathon in the sense that the first couple of kilometers are easy. Anyone can do it. Anyone can send off some resumes and schedule some interviews at firms. But it's really if you're serious marathon runner, you will know that the race doesn't start until the last eight kilometers. It's really the last 1.2, I'll say, that is the most challenging.

That's where it's advantageous to work with a recruiter because we know how to negotiate. We know how to help you get across the finish line in terms of actually closing the gaps and closing the deal. So that's the analogy. That's how I feel about the connection between recruiting and marathon running.

Paula: That's so powerful and so true. I think with recruiting and with other endeavors that we pursue, right, having the idea when it's fresh and exciting, and you've got all the energy and then you get to work and it can be hard. Sometimes it's like you're so close to the end and yet the idea of reaching in and finding it within to just keep going, sometimes that's really tough.

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If you're in the position of negotiating a new salary or situation, absolutely, it can be so helpful to have somebody there who's able to stand by you and help you navigate that process and to help you land where it is that you want to land and how, right. Talk zigzagging plane. You want to make sure that it lands on the runway and it makes it to the destination.

Beth: Exactly. For lawyers, it's like maybe you change jobs a couple of times within your career, but as recruiters, we do this every day. So we've seen it all, and we can really guide you through that process so it's as seamless for you as possible.

Paula: Totally, absolutely. Because it's a one off, or not a one off, but it's a once in a very long while transaction, I would say, for the individual. Yet, as you're saying, it's something that you're in on a regular basis. You have shared so much wisdom. I'm so excited to listen to our episode again because I always do that. I just know I'm gonna love it. I'm gonna love being able to refer clients to this conversation. I think you've shared so much that's so helpful. What other advice would you like to share with our listeners that we haven't covered here?

Beth: I feel like we've covered so much, but at the end of the day I think, and maybe I'm going to repeat myself but it's important, is that it comes back to choice. So as a recruiter, like I said, my job or my intention is to really shine light on your options, to give you as much agency as possible to make the best choice for you. At the end of the day, you are in the driver's seat, and only you know what is right for you. So being able to get to a place where you feel confident in your decisions and in yourself.

Paula: That's fabulous. Thank you. Just a couple more questions, Beth. One of them is relating to working with recruiter. What do you think is the best way for a lawyer to work with a recruiter?

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Beth: Yes. So my advice would be to speak with a few but pick one recruiter who you get along well with, who you truly trust because it's an invested conversation. So you want someone who you feel aligns with you and your values.

My perspective is that a recruiter is your representative in the market. So if you connect well with them, if you align with them, then they likely have the relationships with the firm's, the partners, the companies that you want to work with and who would be a really good fit for you.

So personally, I think that it's about getting someone who will help you look at the longer term strategy that is absolutely critical for your career. So as I said before it's very easy to get pushed into thinking about a specific move in isolation because that's how working with a recruiter often comes up if you're being headhunted. But a good recruiter should be able to help you frame the decision on a longer term basis because your career is 30 years, not 30 days. It truly is a marathon. It's not a sprint.

So I think a lot of recruiters will only think about the next move because that's how they get paid. But it's the good ones who truly understand that it's a long term relationship and that you're looking to a longer term career strategy that really aligns with your long term goals.

Paula: Yeah, I think that's really, really powerful. Thank you so much, Beth. Those are all my questions. I only have one left, which is where and how do people find you?

Beth: The best place to find me is on LinkedIn. That's where I hang out a lot. Also on our firm's website, it's smithlegalsearch.com. Those are the best ways. My DMs and my inbox are always open. So feel free to reach out.

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Paula: Amazing. We will have links in the show notes to what you just mentioned, LinkedIn to Smith Legal Search. Thank you so much, Beth. Thank you so much for being here today. Thank you so much for sharing all your wisdom and insights. I know it's going to resonate with a lot of people. It's really going to help, I think, for lawyers in particular, who are just looking to make a change, who are looking to navigate their next decision. I think the some of the suggestions that you've offered, they're really going to resonate, and they're really going to help. So thank you so much for our time today. It's been amazing.

Beth: Thank you so much for having me. It's been a pleasure.

Paula: Wonderful. See you soon.

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