

## Reboot and Rediscover Your Passion for the Law

July 28, 2016 Marwa Elzankaly

After thirteen memorable years as a trial lawyer at McManis Faulkner, I decided to take some time off and do other things in life. I left my practice in the midst of an all time high in my career – a unanimous verdict in the internationally publicized Mark Oliver Gebel trial, two successful Ninth Circuit appeals in the first government watch list case to be successfully brought to trial, numerous awards, including the California Lawyer of the Year award, a number of happy clients with whom I had established an ongoing long term working relationship, and partnership at a firm with colleagues whom I admired, respected and enjoyed practicing law with.

As fate would have it, it was at that point that I met my husband, got married, and moved overseas to live with him in Egypt. Wise decision? I jumped into my new life with some fear of leaving my comfort zone and delving into the unknown, coupled with excitement about new things to come. Fast forward to today, again in the throes of trial preparation at McManis Faulkner – I am happy with the choice I made and certain it was a wise one.

Practicing law is a profession that can consume you. Even when you enjoy your work, after years of practice, some lawyers find themselves either suffering from burnout, looking for more time to build a personal life, or just wondering what else the world has to offer. The fear of the unknown, however, can be debilitating, leaving one stranded in the day to day, with no hope for change.

My personal experience taught me that change in one's life, while it requires some courage, is certainly doable and in fact, you may return all the better for it. Here are some of the things you should keep in mind.

## **Plan, Plan, Plan**

If you are considering taking some time off, then you should start putting some money aside to fund that time. That is, plan to have funds to pay your expenses during the actual time you take off, plus the additional time it will take you to get back on your feet when you return. Keep in mind the money you spend today on coffee runs, evenings out, or that new expensive outfit, could instead be your ticket to some much needed freedom.

Equally important, consider how to make sure your departure is done with as little disruption as possible. Do not hog work or client contact. Be sure there are others who are equally informed and qualified to work on your cases and with whom your clients are comfortable far ahead of time. It is important to work out a departure schedule and plan with your firm early on. Your firm and your clients will appreciate your honesty and your concern for protecting all interests involved.

## **When You Are Away**

Once you finally take that time off, I found it useful to detach myself from the practice of law completely. Having worked so hard for my bar membership, I kept it active, which took nothing more than paying my annual dues. Aside from that, I left at a time when I had just completed my Continuing Legal Education (CLE) requirements and therefore did not have to worry about that for a few years. Know that the legal field is not without publications and recorded CLE courses, informing lawyers about the latest changes in the law and civil procedure, and the hottest appellate cases. Thus, getting yourself up to speed is not difficult.

Having pried yourself away from the law, make good use of your time. It may be that you decide to travel, volunteer at a non-profit of interest, or work in another field. On the other hand, do not underestimate the power and benefit of living a simple life for some time. I moved to Egypt shortly after its 2011 revolution, and lived there during a time of much political change. I got to experience the struggles of its citizens and see the pros and cons of its legal and political system. For much of that time, I lived in a small farm town on the Nile, where people grow their own crops and livestock and bake their own bread. I am a strong believer that the more you see and experience outside of your own box, the stronger and wiser you are as a result.

Of course, while doing all of this, never forget your family, friends and colleagues. Keep in contact with those who are close to you and share your experiences with them. Those people are your base and will help keep you grounded no matter where you are.

## **When You Return**

Being away gives you time to reflect and think about what you truly enjoy doing. Should you decide that you have had enough of the life of a lawyer, know that with a law degree and your experience, the world is an open forum and you are not without options. Lawyers have been known to start their own businesses, move to the business side in a large company, turn to the non-profit sector, or go into education.

It may also be that you miss being a lawyer and decide to return to practicing law. In that case, know this – it's like riding a bike – you never forget how. Give yourself some time to readjust to the schedule and life of a lawyer, but know that everything will come back to you sooner than you think.

Being a lawyer, especially a trial lawyer, requires life experience, an open mind and creativity. Know that the experiences you have and the time you take outside of your world to think, learn and reflect, will make you a better person, and likely a better lawyer.

*Marwa Elzankaly is Of Counsel to McManis Faulkner. Her clients range from individuals to small business to Fortune 500 companies. Marwa's practice is built on her ability to work closely with her clients, understand their businesses and their needs, and develop the best plan to meet their goals.*

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**About the author** Marwa Elzankaly Recently named to The National Law Journal’s “Winning Litigators”, Marwa represents clients ranging from individuals to small businesses to Fortune 500 companies in general civil and commercial disputes.

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