

What Constitutes a Successful Lawyer?

So, a high school kid is doing a career project and asked me this question.

What is your answer?

---

One who has satisfied clients.

Robert W. Hughes, Jr., Georgia

---

Oh, don't get me started!

Tell the kid to quit focusing on being a so called "success," especially as defined by money, or any other bovine scat you hear from others. That path will only lead to frustration, bitterness and general unhappiness. Instead, simply focus on living a life of honor and service and forget the rest.

Or just tell him money and make it simple.

Sterling L. DeRamus, Alabama

---

Getting clients by word of mouth. A good reputation.

Mitchell Goldstein, Virginia

---

A lawyerly answer would be it depends on how you define successful. Also, rather trite. If you set the standards low enough, every lawyer is successful. For me it is always doing the best I am capable of doing. On the other hand, that was also my notion of being a successful bouncer, truck driver, carpenter, brick layer, etc. Never

much cared what others thought of me, but what I think of myself is very important. I avoid disappointing myself.

Duke, Drouillard, Nebraska

---

There are, of course, several facets to success. One can be "successful" by one's own standards by satisfying those aspects that are most important to them. Some people, for instance, will settle for being highly financially successful at the expense of personal happiness.

To my mind, a "perfectly" successful lawyer:

... will have clients who are predominantly happy with the attorney's integrity, professionalism, and success in meeting the client's objectives.

... will have colleagues who trust, respect, or even admire the attorney's values and professional acumen.

... will earn enough to meet all basic needs and satisfy her or his personal financial priorities.

... will go to work enthusiastically in the morning, and leave contented in the evening (on the whole, and most days).

... will make a net-positive contribution to her or his community.

... will sleep peacefully at night, undisturbed by anxiety, depression, or chemical dependencies. (Most nights, at least.) ... will have a positive, healthy, and robust relationship with her or his family.

... will likely have friends outside the field of law with whom to interact regularly.

... will likely have a pastime or hobby that facilitates any number of the above.

... will be happy.

YMMV,

Richard J. Rutledge, Jr., North Carolina

---

Not being disbarred

Hieu Vu, California

---

Wow, that's a great answer Rick! As a young lawyer (I only graduated 3 years ago!), this is something I aspire to.

For me, as I work to define my own success, I worked to jump off the "BigLaw is king" bandwagon that I often see and/or hear from many of my law school peers. Too often, I think it was easy to get caught up in working at the largest firm, making the most money, with the most prestigious clients.

That is not to say that there are countless attorneys who make all the money in the world working for the biggest clients and are incredibly happy and satisfied in their practice. It just "depends."

Since striking out on my own, I find that I personally get much more satisfaction from working with my clients and helping real people with real issues, while also having time for myself, my wife, my friends, to engage in my hobbies, etc. But, this is just my opinion, every attorney has a different definition on "success" and that is okay!

So as Rick said, your mileage may vary!

Josh Lowenthal, Indiana

---

Part of my daily meditation includes a "prayer" to Themis, "whose blessings fall on the just and the true." Now, I don't seek to be just and true so Themis will drip blessings on me. I meditate on Themis because I like good reasons to be just and true.

A successful lawyer goes to bed with such aims, however frustrated.

Otherwise, do something useful, maybe join the Electrician's union?

Robert Thomas Hayes Link, California

---

Using the standard definition for "success" (involving 'lots' of money and/or prestige), a successful lawyer is one who has a certain moral flexibility, or at a minimum a very nuanced view of morality (that likely isn't shared by the public).

Using our new age definition of "success" (which I clearly and heartily endorse), a successful lawyer is one who is happy and healthy, with fixed and well-defined internal motivations.

Andrew Wentzell, Florida

---

I don't know. It depends on your motivation for being a lawyer.

There are lawyers who make lots of money but whose personal lives are crap. One of my law school roommates, nice guy, hard worker, has built up a very nice PI/Crim practice; he makes much more money than me and is worth a lot more; he also lost his wife because he was too damn busy to pay attention to her. John Morgan, the PI lawyer, is by most standards extraordinarily successful, but he concedes he's an alcoholic and that is in large part because of his drive to be a successful lawyer. Some people have less interest in money than others; some people measure success by their bank account; some lawyers make a ton of money but absolutely HATE their job.

My law school roommate I mentioned, I've talked to him about the practice of law and he basically hates it; he has actually said he is ashamed to be a lawyer; He may have been joking, in part, but even if he was partly in jest there's an element of truth in it.

I make a decent living; sometimes I wish I made a bit more, but overall, I like what I do, I like being a lawyer, I like my practice area. And sometimes it does depend on practice area; there used to be a lawyer in Ocala named Ben Ayres; who as litigator; I knew Ben when he as a litagator; didn't ask him how he liked litigation but eventually he switched practice areas to Adoptions, exclusively; I asked him at one point how he liked doing adoptions and he said he LOVED it. It was the most fulfilling thing he had ever done as a lawyer. Don't know if he made less money off of adoptions than litigation but I suspect so; but in my book even if that was the case, he was more successful as a lawyer because he loved his job.

Ronald Jones, Florida

---

A judge once told me that a good day in court is when you don't go to jail.

Sterling L. DeRamus

---