

Home / Lawyer Personal & Career Goals



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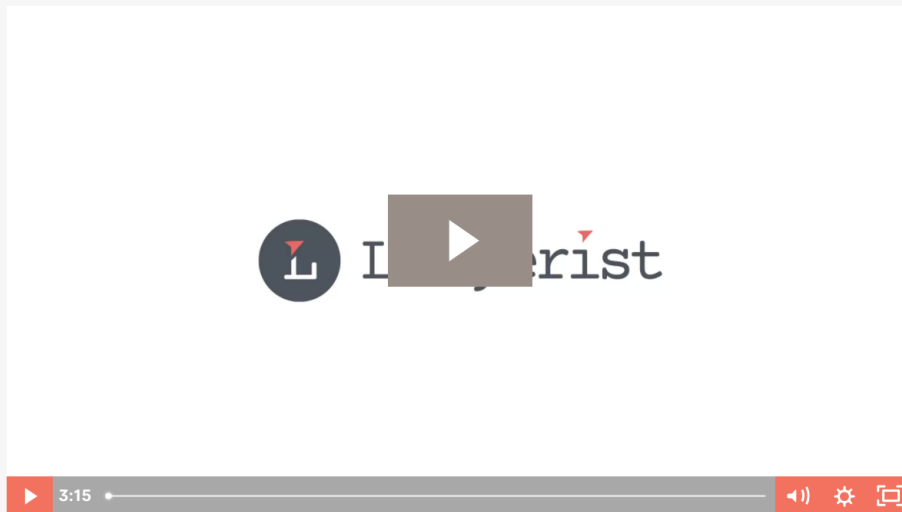
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The most successful lawyers are those who set goals and doggedly work at them. We're not talking about lawyer goals such as "go to law school" or "become an attorney." Those don't qualify as goals. Instead, they are steps you take to reach your bigger life goals.

If you never set goals, how do you find out what you truly want? If you walk through life with vague notions of "success" and "accomplishment", you might never discover that what others have defined as happiness, security, and fulfillment aren't at all aligned with what you believe those things to be.

By asking ourselves what we really want and constantly re-assessing our lawyer goals, we gain the benefit of introspection and self-reflection. We can figure out what it is we really want in life – and then we can go out and do it.

To be successful, you need to set meaningful lawyer goals based on your “why.” You need to know where you want your legal education and law job to take you. You need to have direction. And it all starts with your “why.”

On this Page

- ▼ **Why You Need Clarity on Your Personal Lawyer Goals**
- ▼ **Setting Career and Personal Goals Begins in Law School**
- ▼ **The Goals to Set When Beginning Your Law Career**
- ▼ **How to Set Career and Personal Lawyer Goals for 5, 10, and 15+ Years Into Your Career**
- ▼ **Creating Accountability and Networking with Other Lawyers**
- ▼ **Set, Achieve, and Evaluate Goals With Lawyerist**

Why You Need Clarity on Your Personal Lawyer Goals

Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible.

Tony Robbins

The first step in laying the foundation for successful personal development is to gain clarity around the vague ideas you have floating in your head. With clarity comes:

- **A long-term vision.** Your vision is the ultimate goal or your purpose for doing what you do. Goals help you live out your vision, allowing you to create small milestones to get you there.
- **Short-term motivation.** The whirlwind of daily life often blurs one’s vision. With detailed goals, you gain powerful momentum through each completed task, keeping you motivated day in and day out.
- **Self-control and discipline.** Being an attorney and owning your own law firm requires self-control and discipline for success. Achieving your goals builds character, teaching you the importance of showing up—especially on those days that feel particularly grueling.
- **Better and faster results.** Research shows that **business owners** can spend up to 21.8 hours a week doing things that contribute little to zero value to their business. When you have goals to meet, your productivity increases and you

Gaining this clarity and taking advantage of these benefits require you to dig deep into your purpose, and that deep digging needs to begin well before you start practicing. You must start with setting goals before and during law school.

Setting Career and Personal Goals Begins in Law School

Before you get your law degree and take the bar exam, you must set goals for your future. If you're unsure of how to move forward, first define and understand your "why." Start by asking yourself questions such as:

- Why do you want to go to law school?
- What kind of impact do you want your work to have on the world?
- What type of law job makes that kind of impact possible?
- Which legal businesses employ people with that type of job?
- Which law schools will best serve you?

With answers to these questions, you can then pursue admission into your preferred schools. Once admitted, immediately get more granular about your goals. Determine what you need to do over the next few years to get you closer to achieving your vision. Ask questions like:

- Which electives do you need to take?
- Which internships, externships, or clinics can you pursue?
- Where do you need to work during the summer?
- Which professors should you build relationships with?
- What networking events can you attend to make inroads in the legal community?
- Which organizations should you join to meet people in the field you want to get into?

Once you determine how you want to move forward, ensure you surround yourself with a support network. Create a study group of classmates who will push you to be your best self. At all times, make sure your social circle pushes you toward your lawyer goals.

Every step you take now will determine your success in law school and will provide the foundation for success once you enter the legal workforce.

The Goals to Set When

Beginning Your Law Career

When starting your own law firm or joining an existing practice, you must know specifically what you want to get out of your firm.

- What kind of work do you want to be doing?
- What type of people do you want to serve?
- How do you want to work as a lawyer?
- How many hours do you want to work each week?
- How much vacation do you want to be able to take?
- How much money do you want to make?

Whether or not you believe in work-life balance, it's imperative that you decide what is most important to you across all areas of your life—work, personal, family, friends, and community. Determine how you want your life to be, then set goals to ensure you live out your intentions.

With goals in hand, honestly assess whether your firm can move you forward.

- How close is your firm to getting you to those goals currently?
- How confident are you that your firm will be able to get you to those goals in the next 5, 10, or 15 years?

If your firm is not situated to help you live out the vision you have for your life and career, then it's time to rethink your current situation. Determine what steps are necessary to land in a law job that is better suited for you.

If you believe your firm can get you where you want to go, then it's time to get to work, writing down lawyer goals for the next several years and then breaking those big goals down into actionable steps.

How to Set Career and Personal Lawyer Goals for 5, 10, and 15+ Years Into Your Career

There is a set process for you to follow when setting goals for the near and extended future.

- **Define them.** As we've already covered, it's important that you define your goals as they relate to your overall vision for your work and personal life.

- **Write them down.** According to at least one study on goal setting, people who write down their goals are 33% more successful than those who simply create a plan in their head. And those who are successful create clarity by being specific, laying out everything they need to achieve step-by-step to reach their overarching goals.
- **Tell someone.** Accountability to self is paramount, but human nature makes it so that we're more apt to achieve our goals if someone other than ourselves knows about them. We'll discuss accountability in more detail shortly.
- **Stay committed.** Keep your list of goals in front of you always. Make your own goals as important as your clients' and honor your commitment to them. Create an action plan and schedule time on your calendar to work at it.
- **Celebrate wins.** No matter how large or small the goal or action step, celebrate every accomplishment along the way. [Celebrating progress](#) causes a snowball effect, helping you remain positive in your efforts and allowing you to accomplish even more.
- **Evaluate constantly.** Set a system in place that ensures you evaluate your goals and the progress you're making toward them on a quarterly and annual basis. This will allow you to shift your action plan and update your goals as needed.

When Setting Goals, Be S.M.A.R.T.

SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. According to Brian Tracy, well known international author and speaker, [SMART goals](#) "are able to address all of the flaws associated with regular goals to provide you with a set of goals that will give you the maximum possible benefit." Here's how to hit each letter in every goal you set:

- **Specific.** The goals you create should be as specific as possible. Consider what you want to accomplish, why it's important, what resources you need, and any limitations you may come across as you pursue it.
- **Measurable.** You will want to be able to track the progress you're making on your goals. Metrics allow you to break large goals into smaller tasks and set milestones. They also help you evaluate your efforts.
- **Attainable.** Set goals you can achieve. Make them challenging, therefore worthwhile to pursue. Do not reach so high that you feel helpless or incapable of accomplishing them, however.
- **Relevant.** Choose goals that tie back to your vision and overall career and personal life plans. Do not fall victim to the whims of others or to fads of the time. Stick with what feels right and fits well.
- **Timely.** A goal is not a goal unless it is time-bound. Set a deadline for every goal you define.

How to Set Short-Term vs. Long-Term Lawyer Goals

You will want to set both short- and long-term goals. You will want to set immediate goals of items you want to achieve in the near future. You can put those under your one-year goal timeline. You will also want to plan for your firm's growth as well as your own personal and professional development out to 3 or 5 years, and again out to 10 or 15 years.

With long-term goals, the truth is, no matter the timeline, you want each goal to follow the SMART format. The differentiation comes when you have a one-year goal you are trying to achieve. At that point, you will need to break down your short-term goal into semi-annual, quarterly, and monthly action items to ensure you hit milestones and stay on track.

Include All Levels of Development in Your Lawyer Goals

The first goal most attorneys define is financial, often around law firm revenue or annual salary. Financial goals are important, but they only scrape the tip of the iceberg when it comes to setting goals for your law firm. Also consider setting goals around the client experience, client satisfaction, technology use, marketing efforts, organizational development, and community impact.

Professional development for lawyers also remains top of mind, often due to CLE requirements. But there's much more to consider than meeting law practice requirements. Also, think about additional skills you want to build. Identify if you want to speak at CLEs, not just attend them. You may want to join a bar association or take on pro bono cases. Whatever it is, if you don't get specific and write it down, you won't work on it.

The same holds true for personal goals, which are often overlooked by most lawyers. But personal development for lawyers is just as important—if not more so—than professional development goals. Your personal goals will help you keep your feet on the ground and will provide a means for achieving greater balance or harmony in your life. Consider goals around health such as diet or exercise. Write down and honor personal time commitments such as attending your kids' sports events or your weekly date night with your partner. Include goals around hobbies or other passions such as taking time out to attend the theatre or take cooking classes.

Creating Accountability and Networking with Other Lawyers

When you consciously decide to achieve a goal, you have only a 25% chance at succeeding. But, according to The American Society of Training and Development (now the Association for Talent Development or [ATD](#)), your chances for success in achieving your goals increase by 65% when you tell someone else of your commitment to that goal. Moreover, your chances increase by 95% when you schedule ongoing check-ins with someone to discuss your progress.

To help you reach your goals and achieve the success you've set your mind to, it's important to find someone you can turn to for external accountability. Your options include:

- Finding a mentor

- Joining a mastermind
- Finding your tribe

Find a Mentor

Finding the right mentor takes time and effort. It requires you to look outside your comfort zone and to consider many options.

Even a lawyer with a great reputation might not make the best mentor.

To find a mentor who best fits you, consider not only practice area and time in practice. Look to personality, skills, engagement outside the office, and even work-life balance. You'll be spending some time with this person; considering their personality and values is as important as everything else.

Get an Accountability Partner

Instead of looking to a mentor to help shape your career, you could instead look to your direct peer network to find an accountability partner. You two will support one another's growth and challenges, encouraging each other to push forward even when times get tough.

It's incredibly important that the accountability partner you choose is someone who isn't afraid to ask hard questions or call you out when you're mailing it in. Your goal here is to grow; having someone pat your back and say, "it's ok," when you hit a bump in the road and fell off the wagon will not serve you.

Join a Mastermind

If individual attention isn't what you're looking for, or if you'd rather feed off the collective wisdom of a few, consider joining a [mastermind group](#). This is a small network of trusted attorneys who you can turn to for accountability and business support. Such a group provides a set structure that ensures you intentionally carve out time for your law business to work through problems and opportunities.

When looking for a mastermind that would fit well for you, consider one that has people who will be committed to the group, who will show up, and who you can trust. Note that the job titles in the group don't matter; it's the quality and caliber of the people that counts most.

Find Your Tribe

At the least, consider joining a group of like-minded individuals to network and talk about what you're going through. Your tribe can offer you the support you need while also acting as your accountability touchpoint. Your tribe can come in one of many forms, from exclusive communities like [Lawyerist Insider](#) to networking groups like BNI.

Set, Achieve, and Evaluate

Goals With Accountability

Starting your own law firm is the catalyst to living out your vision. While financial and law firm growth goals are important to your business, they don't provide enough motivation on their own. You must know your "why." Align your career goals and overarching vision for your firm with your purpose, then set SMART goals to get you there.

Also, remember that goal setting is never a one-and-done thing. You must work at it, revisiting your goals on a regular basis to assess where you are, where you've come from, and whether you're still seeking what you set out to pursue in the past. If you'd like help setting your goals, working through challenges, and celebrating successes, turn to lawyers just like you who are doing the same. Become a [Lawyerist Insider](#) today.



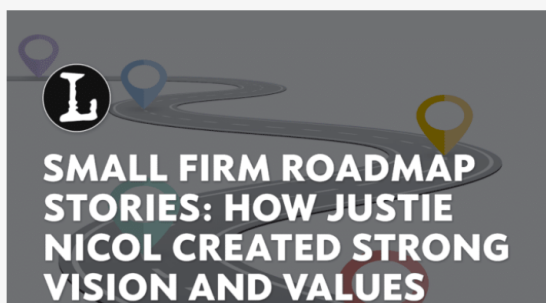
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By the Lawyerist editorial team on November 26th, 2019

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