

THE NATIONAL LAW REVIEW

Avoiding the Funk...Overcoming Job Search Fatigue-Syndrome

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As part of my role as a member of the **Lawyers in Transition Committee for the NYSBA**, I was one of four panelists asked to speak on the topic of “**Avoiding the Funk During the Job Search.**” It is a program we have run for the last several years since 2008 and for those of you that want to watch the full webinar you can download it for free on the NYSBA website.

So while the tips in this blog can be useful anytime the career funk sets in, this blog is for those persistent, noble, red-eyed, weary warriors of the legal job search who have had to weather weeks, months and, in some instances, at least a year of job searching in a weird legal climate.

First things first. You Are Not Unique. Career Funk is everywhere...regardless of your work or job circumstances, whether you are employed, self-employed, unemployed or looking for a job, rest assured, that a sense of ennui, frustration, and good old-fashioned depression can creep into your workday and mindset and derail even the most gung-ho, caffeine-driven career. It happens to me at least once a day like clockwork around 3pm and it hits hard, just like it does for everyone. I guess that’s my first point: You are not unique and neither am I. Career funk will come. Funk will set in for all of us and we all need tips and tools and rituals to help De-Funk.

So it has me thinking? What does **Job Funk & Job Search Fatigue Syndrome** for attorneys look like, what are the causes and what can you do to combat it? So here are some of my initial lay observations about lawyers and why the job search funk hits attorneys particularly hard.

Here’s the crux of it. We are a community of professionals who like to be prepared for the worst and we are trained to throw ourselves into a difficult situation, issue spot, quickly problem solve, fix and move on to the next issue. On a day to day basis, we are accustomed to immediate gratification

So here’s the root of the job funk: many of my clients approach the legal job search with the same, immediate tackle, throw-down and conquer approach that they approached their legal practice. But soon enough within 3 -5 months, attorneys confront a harsh reality that job search in this climate can be a long, protracted and uncertain process. Attorneys come to learn that while they can control the effort they put into their job search, they cannot control the outcome, the timing and the results



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Lack of control, lack of immediate gratification, and a lack of certainty define the new job search reality for many attorneys and can lead to job search funk.

So what can you do to avoid the Funk? Here are some basic suggestions:

1. **Go Inward:** Some of you know that in addition to being a former attorney, I am also a shrink. And so, in my experience, spending quiet time identifying and processing difficult emotions is the starting point for overcoming any funk. Many times when we are in a funk we do not even know what emotions and feelings are brewing beneath the surface; all we know is that we are not ourselves and in a rut. Denial of difficult emotions, such as---rejection, bereavement, fear, grief, loss, hurt, embarrassment, disappointment-- breeds such career obstacles as procrastination, paralysis, indifference, fatigue and just guarantees us more funk. So no more denial! If you are sensing that your job search is running on fumes, it might be time to go inward a little and figure out what is going on internally and emotionally with you. Spending some time identifying what you feel, and allowing yourself to express and process the tough emotions associated with job loss or protracted job transition can actually be a starting point for re-energizing your job search. The only way through the grief and loss is through it... there is no way around it. And when we are in a funk...it's a sign to start going inward, articulate and process the rough feelings with a friend, mentor, counselor or professional.

2. **Connect With Non-Lawyers:** Reducing isolation and finding ways to connect interpersonally is key to reducing the funk. **But here's the deal:** while you are in the job funk, stay away from other attorneys and the networking events that draw other attorneys looking for employment. Why? Because misery likes company and the last thing you need right now is to surround yourself with other well-meaning, highly articulate, equally frustrated and defeated attorneys who can creatively add to your own list of reasons to be miserable. Part of getting out of the funk means protecting yourself.

Find ways to connect with other professionals from other industries through alumni associations, civic organizations, local charities or through hobbies you may have left to atrophy over the last several years. Mix it up and you are more likely to find people that are like-minded and maybe more positive and energetic than you are right now.

3. **Eliminate Well-Meaning, Loveable Energy Drainers:** I am about to give you a De-Funk mantra: **Protect yourself. Protect yourself and then protect yourself some more.** The reality is that while in the job funk, you are emotionally vulnerable. This means that for the immediate future you need to ruthlessly eliminate and/or reduce contact with those loving, caring and well-meaning people in your world—friends, colleagues, family members—who want the best for you, are worried about your “situation” but who, like clockwork, invariably give unsolicited advice that makes you feel worse about yourself, your job search efforts and your career. These are the well-intentioned people who always say and ask the wrong thing about the most sensitive area in your life. Do you have any people like that in your world? Yep. Thought so. Me too. To them and you, I say: **BOUNDARIES.** This is a time for you to create and maintain boundaries.

Reducing contact with these people is imperative to protecting you from sinking deeper into the funk. You can always reconnect with them when you are stronger, more confident and less vulnerable.

4. **Structure Your Day & Get Moving:** Some experts say that finding a job is a 40-hour a week “job.” I do not agree. I don't know about you, but I can't do the same project, task or activity for more than 3 hours much less for 40 hours a week. I need variety. But I do believe that your work week should be scheduled and that the job search game plan, i.e. your resume revisions, networking, and connecting with contacts etc. should be structured and scheduled at the same time every day.

I also believe that exercise of some sort that gets you out of your home and into the world also needs to be structured into your “job search” day. It will help improve your mood, get you seeing other people and feeling that you accomplished something at the end of the day.

5. **Be Selfish by Giving to Others:** My final tip sounds counterintuitive but it actually makes sense. Start paying it forward. I'm not being preachy...I am being practical. When you give you feel better. Full stop. Your situation may be difficult, hard and frustrating but there are people in more dire and difficult circumstances than you or me. Find a way to volunteer your time to a cause you believe in, or to a hospital, children's cause, food pantry, soup kitchen or home for the aged and watch your funk lift! The most selfish thing you can do to get out of your funk is to give to others.

Giving activates our feelings of gratitude for what we have and reminds us that everything in life changes.

Giving to others will make your spirits soar, it is good for the soul and you will gain perspective about your current situation. **All good things.**

Most importantly, there is a difference between job funk and full blown clinical anxiety and depression. If you believe your circumstances may be more serious than a “funk” then there is professional help for attorneys through the NYSBA and City Bar of NY to help address issues related to job loss that are more serious. And I would encourage you to capitalize on these resources to help move you forward.

And finally....I leave you with this quote about facing the challenges of uncertainty in the face of unwanted change, which I often find comforting. Peace.

“Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them; that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.” - Lao Tzu

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