

Are You a Disaffected, Disheartened, or Disoriented Lawyer? Then We Want *YOU*

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Kate Neville

You can tell what the consultant is offering from the packages on her Web site.

There's the "I Don't Know What I Want to Do But This Isn't It" option. And the "I Have Some Idea About Where I Want to Go But Need to Figure Out How to Get There" model. And let's not forget the ever-popular "I Want to Do Anything But Practice Law" selection.

In this punishing economy, Kate Neville, CEO of [Neville Career Consulting, LLC](#), helps disaffected, disheartened, and disoriented lawyers find jobs. A recovering lawyer herself, Neville feels — or remembers — their pain. And she was her own first client. After [Harvard Law School](#), she landed a job at [Simpson Thacher & Bartlett](#) and then worked in-house for the [chancellor of the New York City Public Schools](#) before she launched her company three years ago.

Neville said business is brisk. Some of the growth may be a testament to her skill, but at least part of it, she acknowledged, reflects an industry in crisis. None of her early clients had been asked to leave by their employers. Many now would have preferred to stay, she said. And her fees are sometimes picked up by law firms that pay for "outplacement services" as part of a lawyer's severance package.

Since she's based in Washington, D.C., a fair number of Neville's clients are former or wannabe government lawyers. The largest slice of her client base comes from big law firms. The smallest is from companies — but many of her customers are looking to land in-house jobs.

"The in-house market until very recently has been much tighter than the law firms," Neville said. But she understands from recruiters that it's picking up as companies ask their own lawyers to do more of the work they were once happy to farm out.

Neville has plenty of stories about clients who have come in from the cold. Some assumed they were moving to a cushier existence, and found they'd underestimated the challenges.

One federal prosecutor agreed to join a startup. The business side wasn't quite sure what lawyers do, Neville said, so her client soon found himself interviewing job candidates as the company's de facto human resources department. He'd worked very hard as a prosecutor, but he'd never been so busy he had to sleep in his office — until he began working at the startup.

Neville's role is to help clients identify what they want, and figure out how to get it. When she asks men what their ideal job would be, many say (surprise, surprise) "a professional athlete." Her response is a quick cold slap of reality: "That's not happening." Then she helps them explore why they find the notion appealing: Are they eager to be part of a team? What job prospects would satisfy that need?

Many clients are willing to consider leaving the law. About 20 to 25 percent affirmatively want to get out. Emily Sweet didn't want to throw away the law degree she'd paid for herself, but she was ready for a change from her life as a litigator in the D.C. office of a large Atlanta-based law firm.

She was looking for something that allowed her to be more creative and autonomous, she said. And she'd always loved to read. Neville helped her synthesize these interests, and Sweet is now the director of business affairs at [The Park Literary Group](#), a small New York literary agency.

The legal work is mostly contracts now, but she's also helping authors with Web site design, marketing, and public relations. And loving it. "It's exciting to be part of bringing books into the world," she said.

Neville herself realized pretty quickly that law firm life wasn't for her. "I went to law school to keep my options open," she said. It seemed like a good combination of the practical and the philosophical for someone who didn't know what she wanted to do. And lots of people advised her that the training would prepare her for many careers. But it's not so easy, she found, to translate that advice into actual jobs.

And that realization, it turned out, was the niche she needed for Neville Career Consulting.

— *David Hechler can be reached at dhechler@alm.com.*