

Can the Right Attitude Recession Proof Your Practice?

By Del Friday



In October 2008, I attended the American Bar Association Women Rainmakers Mid-Career Workshop in Tucson, Arizona. During the conference, the preliminary results of the 2008 Women Lawyers Survey by Legal Sales Service Organization were revealed. This study is different from the study recently commissioned by the Law Society of Upper Canada, which focuses on the loss of female lawyers in the legal profession. The LSSO study focuses on the work lives of women lawyers and is intended to assess the professional experiences, business development and

performance of female attorneys.

In an article in the December 2008 edition of the ABA's Law Practice Today, LSSO president and co-founder Catherine Alman MacDonagh, JD said, "LSSO's prior study, conducted in 2003, was the first to explore sales and business development issues for women lawyers and allowed us to identify keys to business development success for them." One of the keys Catherine identifies is "Having the Right Attitude." Easy, I thought. That is one thing I can do right now. The right attitude is free, and having a positive attitude doesn't take a big time commitment and hopefully would help me overcome some of the obstacles standing between me and a fabulous legal career.

When I returned from the conference, the economy seemed to get worse and worse. The majority of my work was real estate and commercial finance. Banks weren't lending as frequently, and the firm's corporate clients weren't buying or selling their property. There was less work in the office, and I was starting to worry about my future as a corporate/commercial associate.

Last October turned into my worst month of billing, but I vowed to myself that I would keep my positive attitude. I didn't focus on the bad economy or some other dragons I couldn't slay. Instead, I looked at myself and decided that I needed to spend more time and effort networking and bringing work into the firm. I joined BNI, an international business networking group, and started wearing a button courtesy of BNI that said "I refuse to Participate in the Recession." I surmised that as long as I continued to work hard, market, network and keep a positive attitude, then I would be immune from the economic downturn. On March 15, 2009, I was laid off.

In my experience, there are a lot of obstacles standing in the way of female lawyers, but I also recognize that with the right attitude some of these obstacles can be overcome. Today the biggest obstacle for me is the economic downturn. I have shed a few tears, and I can no longer rely on a comfortable salary, but overall the layoff did not change my legal path as much as I had feared. I still live and work in Langley, a suburb of Vancouver. I still practice corporate and commercial law albeit I am now a sole practitioner. I even started wearing my button again. After all, attitude is everything.