

Justine's Life as an Attorney, or the Lack of a Life

Over the years I've counseled a number of attorneys. I think the reason so many attorneys have walked into our offices is because of the phenomenal amount of debt that it takes to get through law school. Some have come right out of college, wanting advice on how to best tackle their debt right away. Others have come later, when they've realized that, even though they're making a phenomenal salary, their finances aren't where they "should be." And still others have come a bit too late, after they've racked up their debt, left their high paying just-out-of-college corporate law job and taken a job that they love but pays one-third of their corporate position.

Justine came to me seeking a solution to her dilemma. She'd been quickly promoted at her firm in the six years since she'd left law school and was on track to become a partner. She loved her job, and was doing extremely well. But she had two toddlers and was beginning to question her decision to "have it all." She was considering shifting her career to something less demanding so that she could be with her children more, a decision that would come with about a \$100,000 annual price tag.

She didn't have financial problems on the outside. She was keeping up with her \$125,000 student loan debt, but still had 9 more years to go. She had let her cost of living rise with her position: a large home in a gated community, a luxury car and private school for the kids. It all fit in her spending plan. That is, her spending plan at the firm she was at.

She was in a pickle. Leaving her position would come with the price tag of cutting a lot of things out of her spending plan. If she didn't have the student loan debt, she would have only had to cut a little. But because she hadn't accelerated her repayment of her student loans, she was bound to earning enough to keep up her repayment. In the end, she decided to stay with her firm. She had painted herself into too much of a corner to fathom making all of the changes she would have had to if she changed firms.

That's why I recommend to young attorneys, or anyone working in an industry where you can earn a lot right out of college, to pay their debt off over their first few years, as soon as they're out of college. It isn't an easy thing to do, but only a handful attorney stay at the high-powered, high-paying firms. From a risk standpoint, its best to believe that you're the one that will leave in three years, so make the most of the high salary while you're there.

