

Sunday, February 11, 2007

Taking the leap to being my own boss.

Rather than pursuing an experimental marketing plan of putting my father's enlarged West Point photo on one side and Marx's picture on the other, I went into partnership with another Marks, one much more skilled and excellent, and very much a non-Marxist. (Photo from the public domain). For many years before law school, I dreamed of being my own boss. Nine years passed after law school before I took the leap with my law partner, Jay Marks. Lawyers tend to become their own bosses for one or more of the following reasons: being the master of their own domain; controlling the quality of work performed and the types of cases accepted (and rejected); higher income potential (with higher risk, as well); answering to clients and not to employers; and having insufficient legal job prospects. My motivation for becoming my own boss came from the first two factors, as well as a preference for having more control over my own financial destiny, including not only leaving the world of employers deciding my income, but also entering further into the world of providing pro bono and low bono work at my discretion, without others objecting. Taking the leap to self employment felt -- and still feels -- more empowering and exciting than fearsome. This feeling of optimism was enhanced by joining forces with Jay, rather than hanging my own shingle all by myself. From the very beginning, we have worked together as a yin-yang harmonious whole. Awhile before I knew Jay was interested in having his own law firm, my father asked me about my plan for obtaining clients. I told him that my ideas included enlarging his West Point graduation picture, and putting the same-sized picture of Karl Marx on the other revolving side, so that I could flip the image over depending on the potential client visiting my office. Not only did I never follow up with that, I am not a cheerleader for the military, nor a fan of Marx. Although I did not know it when we opened our firm in 1998, the Internet has been one of the numerous sources of many of our clients -- in addition to recommendations from lawyers, non-lawyers and former and current clients -- through such cyber-corners as our website, which we launched in 1999; the numerous online news articles covering the legal views of me and Jay; and our interaction on various lawyers' e-mail listservs. We spend little money on traditional advertising, and our website and blog costs are limited, since we do most of the Internet work in-house, supplemented with the technical know-how and technology of Daytona Networks. Among the most important inspirations for me finally to have become my own boss was my experience at the Trial Lawyers College, where most of the attendees ran their own law firms as solo and small firm practitioners, and where many of them cheered me on to do the same. With Jay, my Trial Lawyers College connections, fellow zealous criminal defense lawyers, and numerous other kindred spirits and kindred organizations, I always feel empowered and never alone.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 00:00