

**UCLA**

**UCLA Women's Law Journal**

**Title**

The Alarming Growth of Dissatisfaction Among Lawyers: *Running from the Law: Why Good Lawyers Are Getting Out of the Legal Profession*. By Deborah L. Arron. Berkeley, California; Ten Speed Press, 1989, 1991

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9p3278zj>

**Journal**

UCLA Women's Law Journal, 4(1)

**Author**

Hunter, Raquel Aviña

**Publication Date**

1993

**DOI**

10.5070/L341017591

**Copyright Information**

Copyright 1993 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

## BOOK REVIEW

### THE ALARMING GROWTH OF DISSATISFACTION AMONG LAWYERS

RUNNING FROM THE LAW: WHY GOOD LAWYERS ARE GETTING OUT OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION. BY DEBORAH L. ARRON. BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA: TEN SPEED PRESS, 1989, 1991.

Reviewed by Raquel Aviña Hunter\*

Forty-one percent of lawyers who participated in a 1984 American Bar Association survey were "very satisfied" with their jobs. In contrast, a 1990 study revealed that only 33% of the responding attorneys were "very satisfied" with their jobs.<sup>1</sup> This decline in attorney satisfaction is also reflected in the increased number of attorneys who labeled themselves as "somewhat dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied." Both categories exhibited a 2% increase between 1984 and 1990.<sup>2</sup> The ABA Survey thus demonstrated a clear decline in attorneys' satisfaction with their careers.

---

\* J.D. Candidate, UCLA School of Law, 1995; M.A. History, UCLA, 1992; B.A., University of Arizona, 1989.

1. AMERICAN BAR ASS'N, YOUNG LAWYERS DIV., THE STATE OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION 1990 (1991) [hereinafter ABA SURVEY]. In the 1990 study, *The State of the Legal Profession*, the ABA compared the results of the 1984 and the 1990 studies conducted by the ABA Young Lawyers Division. The 1984 study consisted of a random probability sample of 3000 lawyers of all ages drawn from ABA member and nonmember lists totaling 569,706 lawyers. Of these lawyers, 76.9% responded to the combination mail/telephone follow-up survey. The 1990 study consisted of two parts. The first part included 1268 ABA Young Lawyers, 646 ABA lawyers and 368 non-ABA lawyers, all of whom had participated in the 1984 study. *Id.* at 2. The second part of the study included 125,281 ABA lawyers and 41,854 non-ABA lawyers, all of whom had become members of the bar after 1983. *Id.*

2. *Id.* at 54. The number of attorneys who were "somewhat dissatisfied" increased in 1990 to 14%, an increase from the 1984 rate of 12%. The number of attorneys identifying themselves as "very dissatisfied" increased from 3% in 1984 to 5% in 1990. *Id.*

Despite the increased amount of dissatisfaction among lawyers, only 3–4% of the lawyers surveyed actually intended to leave the profession.<sup>3</sup> Although growing discontent with the legal profession has failed to result in a mass exodus from the field,<sup>4</sup> the discussion of lawyers leaving the legal profession and pursuing alternative careers is becoming more widespread.<sup>5</sup> In *Running from the Law: Why Good Lawyers Are Getting Out of the Legal Profession*, Deborah L. Arron chronicles this growing departure from the legal field, and argues that the nature of the legal profession has evolved in a way that has caused dissatisfaction among lawyers, creating incentives for attorneys to pursue other career alternatives.<sup>6</sup> Arron provides a human face to what the statistics are saying about attorney dissatisfaction through a discussion of interviews she conducted with approximately one hundred former attorneys.<sup>7</sup>

This review will discuss the sources of dissatisfaction which Arron enumerates, including the economics of legal practice, the nature of the adversarial system, the monotony and boredom engendered in the field, and a sense among some attorneys that the legal system fails to achieve justice. The review will then discuss which attorneys are likely to leave the profession and some of the dilemmas that attorneys experience when deciding to leave. While Arron's book was not intended to be a study of women in the legal profession, this review will aggregate the information revealed in the interviews with women lawyers, in order to discuss the sources of dissatisfaction that are unique to women lawyers. While other studies may be more scientific presentations of the current state of the legal profession, Arron's method provides a human side to the professional dilemmas of lawyers.

---

3. Stephanie B. Goldberg, *One in Five Lawyers Dissatisfied*, A.B.A. J., Oct. 1990, at 36.

4. Shelly Phillips, *Lawyers Who Want Out: Nearly Half Say They Would Change Jobs if They Felt There Was a Reasonable Alternative, A National Survey Finds*, PHILA. INQUIRER, June 8, 1993, at F1.

5. See 25 MD. B.J., Mar.-Apr. 1992 (this issue is devoted exclusively to the topic of changing careers); Vincent R. Johnson & Virginia Coyle, *On the Transformation of the Legal Profession: The Advent of Temporary Lawyering*, 66 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 359 (1990); Doretta Zemp, *Turned-Off Lawyer*, 10 STUDENT LAW. 22 (1981).

6. DEBORAH L. ARRON, *RUNNING FROM THE LAW: WHY GOOD LAWYERS ARE GETTING OUT OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION* (1991).

7. The author interviewed close to 100 attorneys and read articles about, or spoke informally to, hundreds more. The interviews featured in the book are of successful attorneys who sought to resolve their dissatisfaction with the legal profession before making the decision to leave the field. *Id.* at xiv.

However, much of Arron's analysis is simplistic and fails to consider factors that other authors and studies indicate as sources of lawyer dissatisfaction.

### I. FACTORS WHICH DRIVE GOOD LAWYERS AWAY

Arron presents four reasons for the increased dissatisfaction which is causing a growing number of lawyers to pursue other careers. First, the increasing number of people entering the legal profession has heightened competition for clients and profits, making the work environment more unpleasant. Second, the adversarial nature of the legal system, exacerbated by the competition for business, has contributed to the dissatisfaction. Third, the monotony and boredom which characterize some legal work drives attorneys to seek more satisfying endeavors. And finally, the feeling that the system produces results which are less than just causes a great deal of attorney dissatisfaction.

#### A. *The Economics of Law*

The legal field has experienced a growth explosion in the last twenty years. Between 1970 and 1987, the number of lawyers grew from 326,000 to 676,000.<sup>8</sup> The glut of lawyers, Arron argues, has forced firms to compete for a finite number of clients,<sup>9</sup> placing additional pressures upon lawyers and negatively affecting the level of job satisfaction among attorneys. This competition necessitates billing more hours in order to maintain the profit margin that lawyers have come to expect. Additionally, the high cost of legal technology has chipped away at firms' profits. Law firms have responded to these pressures by running their offices more efficiently and competitively, and demanding more from their associates.

Prior to the 1980s, an attorney who joined a firm tended to stay with the firm until he or she became a partner. As one attorney/interviewee noted, "[t]here was an assumption that if a firm hired you as an associate, and you didn't screw up, you would make partner."<sup>10</sup> Now, however, the competitive legal

---

8. *Id.* at 15. By 1992, the number of lawyers grew to 777,119. Harriet Chiang, *Lean Times Hit the Legal Profession*, S.F. CHRON., Mar. 9, 1992, at A1, A4. By the year 2000, analysts predict that there will be more than one million lawyers. Philip Hager, *Attorney Glut Forces Many to Scale Back Expectations*, L.A. TIMES, Nov. 28, 1992, at A1, A36.

9. ARRON, *supra* note 6, at 18.

10. *Id.* at 21.

market dictates that firms hire and fire with an eye on profits. The difficulty of maintaining a profit margin causes law firms to pressure their attorneys to bill more hours each week.<sup>11</sup> Associates who bill more hours and bring in business are good employees; those who do not are expendable, resulting in lawyers being treated as "fungible commodities instead of potential partners."<sup>12</sup>

The way firms treat their associates clearly affects the level of job satisfaction. Bradley, a Yale Law School graduate, referred to firm practice as a "never-ending rat race" where attorneys are compelled to bill more and more hours in order to cover operating costs and maintain profit margins.<sup>13</sup> This pressure encourages attorneys to "do more than is necessary and cost more [to their clients] than they are worth."<sup>14</sup> The final outcome is that some lawyers feel that they are not providing their clients with the best legal service for their money, creating a sense of disillusionment and discontent with their work.

Arron's analysis, though logical, fails to address the fact that during the economic boom of the 1980s, the fees that attorneys charged their clients soared. In the 1960s, the average billing rate was \$20.00 an hour, whereas by the 1980s the average billing rate increased to \$150.00 an hour.<sup>15</sup> This increase in legal fees meant greater profits.<sup>16</sup> However, it is possible that despite the increased billing rate, firms did not reap larger profits because they had a smaller client base. It is also possible that the cost of legal technology may have eaten away at the profits reaped from increased billing rates. Arron's analysis does not establish what effect the higher billing rates had on the pressure to bill more hours.

In addition to providing only a limited analysis on the issue of profits, Arron does not address the fact that since the recession, firms have been forced to offer more affordable rates to their clients in order to remain competitive. Clients, particularly

---

11. *Id.* at 19.

12. *Id.* at 22. Arron fails to discuss whether the pressure to bill more hours affects men and women differently. One possible difference is reflected in the findings of the ABA Survey. The survey reported that as compared to men, fewer women lawyers are married, more are divorced and more have delayed having children in order to fulfill their career demands. ABA SURVEY, *supra* note 1, at 48. Thus, it is possible that the "career demands" of billing more hours has a different impact on men than it does on women.

13. ARRON, *supra* note 6, at 27.

14. *Id.* at 29.

15. Chiang, *supra* note 8, at A1.

16. *Id.* at A4.

corporate clients, recognize that they can "shop around" and thus refuse to pay the exorbitant fees firms previously charged. Some corporate clients are demanding and receiving discounts from law firms,<sup>17</sup> and contingency fees are becoming more common beyond the area of personal injury law.<sup>18</sup> Some clients have even negotiated to pay a certain fee if the attorney wins and a lower fee if the attorney loses.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, the rise of consumer control may radically alter the nature of the legal profession in the long run, placing different pressures on attorneys than those experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. It remains to be seen how these changes will affect the level of job satisfaction.

The change in how much clients are willing to pay for legal services may also alter the structure of the field. Client demand for lower fees benefits small firms because they generally have lower overhead and can be more efficient.<sup>20</sup> The pressure for lower fees could mean that the mega-firms of the 1980s will either be forced to become more efficient, or that the number of smaller firms may increase. Some scholars argue that firm size directly correlates with lawyer dissatisfaction; the larger the firm, the greater the dissatisfaction.<sup>21</sup> If, as some attorneys predict, smaller firms absorb more attorneys<sup>22</sup> and there is a rise in the number of smaller firms, there may be a correlative increase in attorney satisfaction. Attorneys may be forced to accept the smaller salaries in exchange for the advantages offered by the smaller firm, including greater satisfaction and a more personal environment.

#### B. *The Adversarial System*

The adversarial nature of the legal system is another reason for lawyer dissatisfaction. Arron notes that lawyers have the contradictory assignment of creating agreement between hostile parties through argument and advocacy.<sup>23</sup> They are supposed to advocate for their client by pointing out the merits of their cli-

---

17. Hager, *supra* note 8, at A36.

18. Chiang, *supra* note 8, at A4.

19. Hager, *supra* note 8, at A36.

20. Chiang, *supra* note 8, at A4.

21. Alex M. Johnson, *Think Like a Lawyer, Work Like a Machine: The Dissonance Between Law School and Law Practice*, 64 S. CAL. L. REV. 1231 (1991).

22. Hager, *supra* note 8, at A36.

23. ARRON, *supra* note 6, at 9.

ent's case and all the flaws in the opposing side's position.<sup>24</sup> Such a mission contributes to the combative nature of attorney relationships,<sup>25</sup> with the end result that lawyers' daily lives are filled with dispute and confrontation.<sup>26</sup>

The adversarial nature of the profession necessarily involves close scrutiny by opposing counsel. As one attorney comments, "practicing law is the only profession in which there is an equal and opposite professional whose job it is to prove that you are wrong."<sup>27</sup> In addition to close scrutiny by opposing counsel, clients, judges, and juries continually pass judgment on an attorney's work. One attorney bitterly notes that the scrutiny of a case can continue even after the case is closed, since an attorney may be sued for malpractice though he no longer carries malpractice insurance.<sup>28</sup>

Arron recommends increased mediation or Alternative Dispute Resolution as means of reforming the legal system and increasing lawyer satisfaction.<sup>29</sup> Mediation is an attractive option for clients who seek less costly legal solutions to their problems. Arron recognizes that while firm profits may be significantly reduced by the decreased amount of litigation and other legal work, firms may have to make the choice between providing the mediation service or watching their profits decrease even further.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to recommending that firms become more actively involved with mediation, some lawyers believe that there will be a natural evolution of the adversarial system toward it. As the number of attorneys continues to increase and the legal profession becomes less lucrative, the field will tend to attract people who are more willing to forego the profits of litigation when the client is better served by mediation.<sup>31</sup>

---

24. *Id.* at 13.

25. *Id.* at 16.

26. *Id.* at 11.

27. *Id.* at 10-11.

28. *Id.* at 11.

29. *Id.* at 137.

30. *Id.* See generally Desiree French, *Arbitration Avoids Courts, Saves Money*, BOSTON GLOBE, Mar. 26, 1985, Business, at 25.

31. Chiang, *supra* note 8, at A4.

### C. *Monotony and Boredom*

The lawyers surveyed also complained of the monotony and boredom of their jobs.<sup>32</sup> While television dramas portray a lawyer's life as glamorous, the thrill of winning a big case is rare and thus fails to overcome the boredom of preparing for trial.<sup>33</sup> Lawyers spend much of their time waging wars of attrition with tedious stacks of "interrogatories, inconsequential motions before uninterested judges, and interminable examinations of witnesses about unexciting elements of their ordinary lives."<sup>34</sup>

The 1990 ABA survey supports Arron's conclusion that the tediousness of legal work contributes to attorney dissatisfaction.<sup>35</sup> According to the survey, 41% of lawyers spend only 0-5% of their time in court for trials and administrative appearances, while 37% spend 6-20% of their time in court.<sup>36</sup> Given the relatively small amount of time spent in court, it is understandable that the thrill of winning seldom occurs.

While Arron's explanation concerning monotony and boredom receives support in other sources, her analysis sheds little light on what changes in the legal profession have contributed to such complaints. One possible explanation is the increased degree of specialization among attorneys, which the American Bar Association discussed in a 1984 panel on General Practitioners.<sup>37</sup>

In the past, general practitioners handled all of their clients' legal needs. However, as lawyers became increasingly specialized, general practitioners noticed a trend towards clients seeking out lawyers who were experts in a specific area of the law.<sup>38</sup> Specialized lawyers began to join other specialized lawyers, creating mega-firms, and when an associate joined such a firm he or she was trained in and received work in the area of his or her specialization.<sup>39</sup> It is possible that consistently working in a single, narrow area of law has contributed to the sense of dissatisfaction of which lawyers complain.

---

32. See generally Phillips, *supra* note 4.

33. Arron, *supra* note 6, at 30.

34. *Id.*

35. ABA SURVEY, *supra* note 1, at 15.

36. *Id.*

37. REPORT OF THE AMERICAN BAR ASS'N TASK FORCE ON THE GENERAL PRACTITIONER AND THE ORGANIZED BAR 18-19 (July 1984).

38. *Id.* at 18.

39. Johnson, *supra* note 21, at 1243.



While most jobs have some aspects that seem boring and mundane, the complaints among lawyers of monotony and boredom may be due to the higher expectations lawyers have upon completion of three years of professional training. Arron's book fails to incorporate lawyer expectations in the equation of job satisfaction, and it would be interesting to see further study of this issue in order to understand the perspective from which attorneys assert that their jobs are uninteresting.

D. *Feeling That the System Does not Serve the Interests of Justice*

In addition to the reasons discussed above, some attorneys Arron interviewed were disillusioned by their personal experiences with the workings of the legal system. Although these attorneys tried to help their clients in resolving their legal problems, they felt that the inefficient and overburdened system thwarted this goal.<sup>40</sup> One attorney thinks lawyers do not solve problems, but instead create them.<sup>41</sup> Other attorneys believe that their work is little more than a part of the process of transferring money from one person to another, with little real impact on the issues of justice and fairness.<sup>42</sup> Kate, a former private practitioner, became disillusioned and frustrated by a system which is supposed to produce justice but instead produces skewed results.<sup>43</sup> Thus, a sense that the system does not serve the interests of the client contributes to attorneys' dissatisfaction with the profession.

Men and women lawyers alike, according to Arron, attribute the unhappiness of their professional lives to the profession's economic structure, adversarial nature, the monotony and boredom involved in legal practice and the feeling that the system is ineffective in achieving justice. It becomes apparent from reading Arron's interviews, however, that women have additional concerns with which men do not have to contend.

## II. WOMEN LAWYERS

The focus of Arron's book is not women in the legal profession. However, at several points in the book Arron passes up

---

40. ARRON, *supra* note 6, at 44.

41. *Id.* at 45.

42. *Id.* at 50.

43. *Id.* at 45.

excellent opportunities to explore issues of particular concern to women lawyers. Eleven of the thirty interviews in Arron's book are with women; a compilation of the results of these interviews reveals that women, more than men, pay for career success with their personal lives.<sup>44</sup>

Although feelings of discontent and anxiety are common to both men and women, Arron's interviews highlight the fact that women in the legal profession are exposed to a source of stress that is unique to their gender. Since women are traditionally the primary caretakers of children, they must often contend with their dual roles as legal professional and mother. Women are forced to either juggle a career and a family or make a choice between the two. Arron cites a disturbing statistic: as compared to men, women lawyers are twice as likely to be single and three times as likely to be childless.<sup>45</sup> The tension of having to juggle or choose is heightened by the fact that the competency of women is not assumed; instead, women must prove themselves by performing better than their male colleagues.<sup>46</sup> The end result is that a female lawyer must be what Arron labels "the Lawyer-Super Woman".<sup>47</sup>

One female attorney described the impact of the "juggle or choose" dilemma on her life. She changed jobs in the legal field four times in six years in an attempt to cope with the demands of both her family and her career. Her marriage ended before she finally accepted a position as a law school dean which allowed her the necessary time to be with her family.<sup>48</sup> Another female attorney had a successful career in international law, but finally realized that the long hours left little time for life outside of work. It was not until she quit her legal practice and took a job in the entertainment industry that she met and married her husband.<sup>49</sup>

---

44. The unique stresses with which women must contend are reflected in the statistics from outside sources concerning women lawyer dissatisfaction. According to the ABA survey, twice as many women as men report being dissatisfied with their work. Ethan Bronner, *Survey Finds Lawyers Are Generally Happy With Their Careers*, BOSTON GLOBE, May 21, 1990, National/Foreign, at 3; Kim S. Hirsh, *Family Concerns, Sexism Tax Lawyers' Skills*, CHI. TRIB., May 9, 1993, WomaNews, at 11; Susan Skiles, *ABA Survey Shows More Lawyers Are Becoming Dissatisfied*, CHI. L. BULL., Aug. 20, 1991, at 1.

45. *ARRON*, *supra* note 6, at 38.

46. *Id.*

47. *Id.* at 37.

48. *Id.* at 39-40.

49. *Id.* at 73.

While Arron's interviews touch briefly upon the pressures women are under to perform and the price they pay with their personal lives, Arron provides only one interview with a woman struggling to cope. It would have been helpful if Arron had included more interviews with women concerning this topic, especially since Arron noted that women are more likely than men to be unmarried and childless.<sup>50</sup>

Arron's study also fails to consider separately other reasons women lawyers have for dissatisfaction with the law. In May of 1993, several conferences organized by Louise A. LaMothe, chief of the American Bar Association's Litigation Section, addressed the issues women lawyers face. Several of the speakers noted that many women were leaving large firms due to job dissatisfaction.<sup>51</sup> The factors commonly cited for job dissatisfaction include the difficulty of making partner in the law firms and the high level of sexual harassment on the job.

The perception that women have difficulty advancing professionally is a belief well supported by the statistics. Women currently enter private practice at the same rate as men, however, after ten years of practice only 23% of the women make partner, as compared with the 59% of men who do so.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to dealing with a slower rate of promotion, women lawyers must contend with sexual harassment on the job. The ABA survey showed that 85% of the female respondents reported witnessing or experiencing at least one type of sexual harassment on the job.<sup>53</sup>

Arron's book deals with the concerns of women lawyers only to a limited extent and completely fails to address the prospects for improving circumstances for women in the legal profession. Other sources indicate, however, that changes may be occurring for women lawyers with respect to the glass ceiling and the difficulty of managing families and careers.

---

50. *Id.* at 38.

51. Hirsh, *supra* note 44, at 12.

52. Donald B. Hilliker & Catherine F. Chaskin, *Firms Must React Now to Changing Legal Work Force*, 13 No. 4 Law. Hiring & Training Rep. 2, at 2. See generally Laurel G. Bellows, *Looking Through Law's Glass Ceiling*, CHI. TRIB., June 2, 1991, WomaNews, at 15.

53. ABA SURVEY, *supra* note 1, at 67. Men were also asked whether they had witnessed sexual harassment and 78% responded by saying that they had witnessed at least one type of sexual harassment in the past two years. The report notes that this statistic is especially revealing since some sexual harassment undoubtedly occurs in private. *Id.* at 68.

One woman lawyer notes that while there is a glass ceiling, it is not impossible to pierce. Quality firms can no longer ignore the number of successful women graduating from top law schools and are forced to offer them competitive positions.<sup>54</sup> Once their foot is in the door, women have difficulty making partner; however, if women simulate the mentoring process that is prevalent among men, they too could guide and assist new women lawyers as they enter the field. It is this mentoring process that will make it possible for more women to break through the glass ceiling.<sup>55</sup>

The Family and Medical Leave Act ("the Act"), enacted earlier this year, will also help alleviate women's concerns about juggling their family and their careers. Under the Act, employers, with some exceptions, must allow employees to take twelve weeks of family leave.<sup>56</sup> Although the Act will benefit attorneys who practice in large and medium sized firms, not all attorneys will benefit. The Act is applicable only to employers with fifty or more employees at one job site or at multiple job sites within seventy-five miles of each other.<sup>57</sup> Thus, small firms are not required to comply with the Act, leaving their employees unprovided for unless such firms voluntarily offer these benefits or are required to pursuant to state law.

Despite these omissions in Arron's analysis, she cautions against women staying in a career that is dissatisfying out of a sense of guilt and obligation to other women. Some women, Arron argues, feel pressured to be role models and mentors for other women, or believe that the legal system may be "humanized" through feminine influence.<sup>58</sup> Arron's profiles of women lawyers demonstrate that with the growing number of women in the legal profession, it is senseless for a woman to sentence herself to a career which makes her unhappy simply out of a sense of obligation.

### III. MAKING THE CHOICE TO LEAVE

After enumerating the primary reasons causing attorneys to leave the profession, Arron argues that the process of indoctrination into the legal profession is the root of the struggle for attor-

---

54. Skiles, *supra* note 44, at 16.

55. Bellows, *supra* note 52, at 15.

56. J.W. Waks & C.R. Brewster, *Family Leave Coverage is Overestimated*, NAT'L L.J., May 3, 1993, at 20.

57. *Id.* at 20.

58. ARRON, *supra* note 6, at 67; *see also* Hirsh, *supra* note 44, at 13.

neys who later consider changing careers. During law school, most students feel compelled to compete for the best grades, the high paying summer associate positions and coveted positions on Law Review. They obediently strive to be the most successful among their peers, even if they are uncertain it is what they truly desire.<sup>59</sup> Upon graduation, young attorneys are seduced by the prospect of the high salaries, security, and prestige that large firms offer.<sup>60</sup>

When attorneys who have devoted years to being successful begin to acknowledge their dissatisfaction, they are faced with a dilemma. They recognize the desire to escape from the source of their dissatisfaction, the profession itself, but find it difficult to leave the trappings of success which their hard work has brought them.<sup>61</sup> Some attorneys described feeling ashamed and depressed when making the decision to leave their careers.<sup>62</sup>

The psychological distress caused by their decision is compounded by the attorneys' sense of being lost and unsupported as they decide what they will do with their futures. Family members question why a person would want to leave such a lucrative and prestigious profession, and often the attorney must contend with the loss of his or her identity as an attorney.<sup>63</sup> It is the sense of isolation within the profession, however, that seems most profound. Attorneys apparently feel uncomfortable discussing their desire to abandon their legal practice, as evidenced by the observations of several attorneys. These attorneys noted that after they finally made the decision to leave, numerous colleagues covertly confided, behind closed doors, that they too wanted to leave the profession but felt they were unable to do so.<sup>64</sup>

Dissatisfied attorneys who consider leaving must choose between job security and the fear of unknown, but potentially more fulfilling, careers.<sup>65</sup> The attorney must explore alternative career options and determine whether he or she has the financial resources to change careers.<sup>66</sup> Although these considerations and dilemmas are difficult, the majority of the attorneys Arron profiles made a successful transition to a new career.

---

59. ARRON, *supra* note 6, at 59-60.

60. *Id.* at 64.

61. *Id.* at 88.

62. *Id.* at 86, 90.

63. *Id.* at 86-88.

64. *Id.* at 66, 70.

65. *Id.* at 68.

66. *Id.* at 82.

It is the ease with which these attorneys found new careers, however, that leaves the reader disconcerted. All of the attorneys profiled appear to have found careers that suit them perfectly and are fulfilled and happy with their lives since they left the legal profession. The ease with which an attorney can make such a transition is contradicted by other literature. The Maryland Bar Journal, for example, devoted an entire issue to the topic of lawyers switching careers.<sup>67</sup> One of the articles discusses the prospects of changing careers, characterizing the process as complex, challenging, and difficult.<sup>68</sup>

The fantasyland image that Arron presents is unmarred by stories of people who have attempted to make a career change and regret their decision to leave the legal profession. The reader is left with the impression that all career changes occur without mishap, which seems highly unlikely. Although Arron's book is encouraging and motivating, it does not appear to present the risks of changing careers in a realistic manner.

#### IV. THE ONES WHO DO NOT LEAVE

Some of the attorneys interviewed experienced the dissatisfaction Arron describes but chose not to leave the profession completely. Those who did not leave appear to have successfully designed a compromise which addresses the sources of their dissatisfaction. Such compromises include part-time practice<sup>69</sup> and taking three month furloughs every three or four years.<sup>70</sup>

However, other literature again questions the idyllic picture Arron paints. Pursuing non-traditional legal careers is difficult in a profession steeped in tradition and conservatism. Arrangements such as free-lance lawyering are rare because firms are unconvinced that free-lance attorneys are qualified.<sup>71</sup>

---

67. 25 MD. B.J., Mar.-Apr. 1992, *supra* note 5.

68. Susan Gainen, *Non-Traditional Career Paths of the 1990's*, 25 MD. B.J., Mar.-Apr. 1992, at 3. See generally Roberta Kaskel & Kathryn Baker, *The Possible Dream: Alternative Careers*, MD. B.J., Mar.-Apr. 1992, at 14.

69. ARRON, *supra* note 6, at 113.

70. *Id.* at 121.

71. Sandra Griffin del Villar, *Lawyer Offers an Alternative Through Free-Lance Assistance*, WASH. POST, May 22, 1989, at 1; Janet S. Eveleth, *Attorneys Go Temp*, MD. B.J., Mar.-Apr. 1992, at 8.

## V. REFORMING THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Arron also devotes a chapter to ways in which the legal system could be reformed in order to address the characteristics of the profession that cause lawyer dissatisfaction. She recommends, among other suggestions: the implementation of a value billing system,<sup>72</sup> reformation of the educational system,<sup>73</sup> and greater use of mediation in order to decrease the adversarial nature of the system and increase the efficiency and efficacy of the legal system.<sup>74</sup>

Of the recommendations Arron discusses, only one seems insufficiently analyzed. Arron critiques the process of educating law students by pointing out that law schools direct students down career paths they may not want to go or for which they are not suited. This analysis is taken further by other critics of the legal education process.

A 1990 study published by the Georgetown Law Journal reveals that only 62% of the 1983 Georgetown graduates surveyed felt that the practice of law fulfilled their expectations.<sup>75</sup> The failure of the legal practice to meet expectations is caused, according to one scholar, by the failure of law schools to educate their students about the realities of legal practice.<sup>76</sup> The author contends that schools teaching abstract, academic issues of law fail to portray realistically what employment in a law firm entails.<sup>77</sup> Course curricula expanded to include courses on the nature of law firms, especially large law firms, would provide students with a more realistic understanding of legal practice prior to their employment, reducing the odds of subsequent shock and disillusionment.<sup>78</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Arron's contention that attorneys are abandoning their legal careers in response to the economic structure of the profession, the monotony and boredom involved in law, the adversarial nature of legal work and a sense of disillusionment with the judicial

---

72. ARRON, *supra* note 6, at 129.

73. *Id.* at 132.

74. *Id.* at 136.

75. Edward W. Lempinen, *Some Like It Not*, 18 STUDENT LAW., Apr. 1990, at 6. The study was based on a survey of 1983 graduates from 20 law schools.

76. Johnson, *supra* note 21, at 1234-40.

77. *Id.*

78. *Id.* at 1233.

system, is substantiated by the interviews she presents and by the general literature on the topic. Her discussion of how attorneys cope with their decision to leave the profession can offer discontented attorneys a sense that they are not alone in their dissatisfaction and content attorneys an understanding of those who wish to leave the profession.

More specifically, *Running from the Law* is useful to a variety of legal professionals in different ways. Practitioners who are toying with vague feelings of dissatisfaction will benefit from reading *Running from the Law* and thus beginning the process of evaluating existing remedies for their unhappiness. Legal educators can also benefit from this book by gaining an understanding of the sources of lawyer discontent in order to better guide their students.

Students who have experienced doubts about the profession during their legal education should find Arron's book useful. Students who entered law school because they did not know what else to do or because they wanted to delay deciding upon a career are prime candidates for lawyer dissatisfaction.<sup>79</sup> Arron's book can serve as a tool in enabling students to make sound career decisions before accepting employment that leaves them unhappy and dissatisfied.

*Running from the Law* will also prove insightful for students who have no doubts about the profession. Arron's discussion permits content law students to begin their career with an understanding of potential costs and benefits of the profession, thus protecting against subsequent shock or disillusionment. An informed understanding of the field enables students to make initial career choices based upon the insights provided by attorneys who have already learned about the profession.

Arron's book raises important issues concerning a problem that is beginning to receive widespread recognition in the legal profession. Although her analysis is sometimes superficial and limited, ignoring many of the complexities involved in the nature of the legal profession, her anecdotal portrayal of the subject nonetheless offers information that other studies cannot.

Surveys such as the 1990 ABA Survey<sup>80</sup> provide an overview of which lawyers are unhappy and why. However, Arron's study gives a voice to these statistics, communicating the sense of disil-

---

79. Phillips, *supra* note 4, at F3.

80. ABA SURVEY, *supra* note 1.



lusionment and conflict that attorneys feel when they consider leaving the profession that they have chosen as their career. The opportunity to hear from these attorneys is an important one, for attorneys individually, and for the legal profession in general. If the legal profession hopes to retain the most desirable attorneys, it must respond to the concerns of the growing numbers who are voicing their dissatisfaction. Understanding these concerns, through a book such as Arron's, is the first step to developing solutions to the problems that are driving good lawyers away.