

# My Life Is My Artwork: Create a Practice That Is Part of the Artwork

*"If I am an artist and my life is my art, then I already have everything I need." –Rolf Gates*

I read the above quote by Rolf Gates when I was taking a yoga training. The thought stuck with me. I started to consider what the canvas of my life looked like. I noted that parts of the canvas contained dark clouds. Other parts contained rainbows. I noted several places where I had fallen off of a horse and was struggling to get back up again. There are the parts where I am reaching for the stars. There are times when I am wrapped inside a bud and times when life is in full bloom.

## The Blurry Parts

I particularly noted two things about the canvas. There are many parts of the canvas where the colors and objects are just a blur. I also noted that the canvas includes many people.

I thought about the blurry parts. The blurry parts come in many sizes and forms. Some are periods of great trauma, such as the time surrounding the loss of my brother. Some are times when life is simply a mad juggle trying to balance everything on the plate. The blurriest part of the canvas is the part that reflects the time I was trying to build my law practice in BigLaw while raising a young child as a single mom. When I think about that time, I remember how many times I thought, "I only have to do this for X number of years...."

The best part of the canvas is where I made a shift to a clearer vision, a clearer path, and a life that is by design. For me, it was a decision to leave BigLaw and start my own firm. Starting my firm had its challenges, but, at the same time I left BigLaw, I made an absolute commitment to making conscious decisions about anything that I put on my plate. There are parts of the canvas later that still reflect a plate that is too full with items dropping off, but those parts of the canvas are always followed by moments where the plate returns to manageability as a result of making conscious choices to make that happen.

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**Career Development & Wellness Columnist:** Mary E. Vandenack, JD, ACTEC®, COLPM®, is the founding and managing member of Vandenack Weaver LLC in Omaha, Nebraska. Mary also has an advanced certificate of positive psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and is a long-time Yoga RYTE.

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## The Blank Part of the Canvas

Consider creating your own canvas and spending some time evaluating what the canvas looks like to date. Did you create what is on your canvas, or did it happen haphazardly? At some point, the canvas will be blank. The blank part of the canvas represents today and whatever is left of your journey on this earth.

When I got to that part of my canvas, I realized that I could create my own artwork. It might not always be pretty. I might not always be in control of life events, but I could be in control of making certain life decisions and creating resilience and positivity in my life despite the events I could not control.



## Design Our Life and Our Practice as Artwork

I have always struggled with the phrase "work/life balance." The phrase implies that work and life are two different things and that work is not part of life. The fact is that for those of us who have chosen the legal profession, work is often a significant part of our life.

When I started my firm, I decided to design my practice so that I loved it. I had been through a few law firms before I set out on my own. During that period, I had come to believe that I hated practicing law, but the fact was I simply hated the cultures in which I was practicing law. In my own law firm, I got to choose the culture.

I was fortunate to work with some excellent mentors and coaches as I built my business. I defined what my practice areas were going to be. I chose practice areas that I enjoyed and that allowed me to build relationships. I am not suggesting that every lawyer start her own practice, but rather that, wherever one is practicing, she make conscious decisions about as much as possible on the chosen career path.

Personally, I defined what an ideal client would be. I committed to only working with clients who fit that definition.

By consciously choosing my practice area and being selective about the clients I accepted, I was able to build a practice that I am passionate about. It's a rare experience that I am ever looking at the clock wondering when the end of the workday will come. Instead, I am often trying to beat the clock to finish things that I really want to do. I am trying to beat the clock because I have also made commitments to end the day and shift.

## Having Intentions and Returning to Them

In designing my plan, I worked with various coaches. I was taught the power of setting intentions. Setting intentions

creates a picture of what we want to do. I wanted to have a practice that I loved, but I also wanted to have time for activities and people who I care about outside of the practice.

It is helpful to create a written list of intentions. Intentions can be general or specific. A general intention might be wanting to have more emotional resilience. A specific intention might be limiting your work schedule to a certain number of hours per week.

Once you have created a written list of intentions, it is important to return to them regularly. An issue that arises for many of us in living by our intentions is tricky patterns. The patterns represent ways that we have trained the mind in the past. To the extent any of our go-forward intentions require some changes, we need a method to hone the process.

There are many methods to hone the process. One such method is

meditation. Seek to train and focus the mind in a way that allows you to create art with the way you live your life.

John W. Gardner said: "Life is the artwork of drawing without an eraser." Draw well. ■