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Career exploration project

For my career exploration project, I interviewed two legal professionals whose work connects closely to public policy and public service: Ken Haber, a criminal defense attorney, and Albert Strazza, a real estate attorney in private practice. I chose to interview these two people because I am interested in pursuing a legal career and wanted a realistic understanding of what different paths within law actually look like on a day-to-day basis and see how 2 peoples paths are different and similar. I was especially interested in learning about how attorneys decided their specific areas of practice, what their work-life balance looks like, and what advice they would give to students who are considering law school. While doing these interviews, I asked questions about their career paths, daily responsibilities, the most rewarding and challenging parts of their jobs, and I also asked whether they would still choose the same career if they were starting over. Both interviews offered honest insight into the legal field and helped me think more seriously about my own future career decisions.

Ken Haber's career path immediately stood out to me because it was not straightforward or planned from the beginning. He originally went to law school because he was interested in politics and did not actually intend to become a lawyer. While he was still a law student, he became involved in advocating for students who were facing disciplinary proceedings before a university disciplinary board. Through that experience, he realized that he genuinely enjoyed

advocating for people and standing up for individuals who were in vulnerable positions. That moment played a major role in changing how he viewed the law and what he wanted to do with his degree.

After graduating from law school, his career path continued to change. He practiced civil law for a period of time but quickly realized that it was not the right job for him and that he did not enjoy the work at all. He then became a prosecutor, which he said gave him valuable experience working in court and understanding how the criminal justice system operates from the government's side. He told me that he always felt drawn to the defense side and wanted to be the one representing individuals rather than the state. In 1998, he started his own criminal defense practice, which got him to focus on the work he was most passionate about. Hearing about this process made it clear that finding the right area of law can take time, and that it is normal for attorneys to move through different roles before landing where they truly belong.

When discussing work-life balance, He was very honest about the demands of (specifically) criminal defense work. Because he owns his own practice, he has more flexibility than some attorneys, but the job itself is still extremely stressful. He explained that balancing work and personal life is very important in order to handle the emotional weight of the cases he takes on. He told me that the court schedules can be intense (but when possible), he is sometimes able to plan court dates around vacations or important family commitments. Throughout his career, he made a strong effort to attend his children's sporting events and be present for his family, even during busy periods. While he acknowledged that there were times when the job felt overwhelming, he believes that overall he has managed his balance well. He also emphasized

how important family has been in helping him manage stress, and noted that without that support, many people in high-stress legal careers turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as overworking or substance use and that he's seen it with people close to him happen before.

One of the most meaningful parts of his job is his role as a criminal defense attorney. He described his work as standing up to “the big bully,” referring to the government, and ensuring that his clients’ constitutional rights are respected. He explained that police officers do not always intentionally violate rights, but identifying those violations is one of the most rewarding aspects of his job because it can significantly impact a client’s case. He also spoke about how deeply he cares about his clients, pointing out that he is sometimes the only person standing between them and extremely serious consequences, including life in prison or, in some cases (which he said he has been the attorney for before), the death penalty. He enjoys being in court and said that presenting cases to a jury is still exciting for him, even after many years of practice. Although the work is stressful, it is also what makes the job meaningful to him.

His advice for students considering law school was also very helpful. He pointed out that (unlike many other post grad schooling) that there are no specific undergraduate prerequisites for law school, which gives students flexibility in choosing a major. He said encourages students to study the topics they are genuinely interested in and to focus on doing well academically, instead of trying to follow a specific “law school track.” He also pointed out the importance of going into law for the right reasons. He told me that pursuing law purely for financial reasons is a mistake, since the profession can be stressful, emotionally draining, and sometimes repetitive or even boring and if you only go into it for the money you will be unhappy, stressed, and burn out

fast (and also not be very good at the job in general). He explained that he would not want to practice law if he were not in criminal defense, because that is where his passion lies. This reinforced the idea that enjoying your area of practice is critical for long-term satisfaction in the legal field which will make me really think about how each type of law feels to me so I don't make that mistake.

Albert Strazza's interview gave me a very different but also a valuable other perspective on a legal career. His path to law school was also not direct, he told me that he spent time in the service and worked many different jobs before deciding to get a legal degree. Instead of going to law school right after college, he went to night law school while working full-time in his later 20's after doing other types of work. After graduating, he worked in larger law firms before deciding to switch into private practice (which was around fifteen years ago). He told me that his background in building, construction, and environmental-related work has been pretty useful in his current job as a real estate attorney, since it helped him to better understand the physical and technical aspects of homes and properties. His experience proves how real life learning and life experience can strongly influence and strengthen a legal career.

From what he told me it seems as though work-life balance has been one of the more challenging parts of his career, He is a solo practitioner, and he explained that he is constantly answering calls and staying connected to clients and the office. He told me about how difficult it can be to fully disconnect from work, especially in real estate law, where clients often expect immediate responses. He also said that in addition to the legal work, as someone who has their own firm he has to market himself and manage the business side of their practice, which adds to the

workload. He strongly emphasized the importance of paralegals, and said that good paralegals are “worth their weight in gold” because they allow attorneys to delegate tasks and regain some personal time. Even with that support, he emphasized that there are pretty big sacrifices that may be required in this field.

During our conversation he also told me an example of a realistic view of what legal work actually feels like. He compared law to construction, explaining that when building something, you can physically see the results of your work at the end of the day. In contrast, legal work often feels never-ending, as attorneys may start and end the day with the same amount of a pile of paperwork on your desk. He explained that the value of certain types of legal work is not always immediately visible and that attorneys must find that fulfillment in helping people solve complex and stressful problems and not necessarily by trying to see change. Over time, he has become someone many people turn to for help, which he told me he feels is rewarding and also can feel demanding.

His advice for me focused a lot on people skills. He explained that law is pretty much all working with people, and it is usually during difficult or emotional situations. Being able to identify the core legal issues, focus on the relevant facts, and clearly explain the law to clients is essential and that you need to not necessarily get emotional with them or the work will be way more emotionally draining. He also mentioned (and seemed like he felt this was very important) that as a person you should never assume they are the smartest person in the room. One of his most memorable pieces of advice he told me was that he often says that you have “two eyes, two ears, and one mouth,” meaning listening and observing are just as important, or even more

important, than speaking. He also encouraged me to think ahead about job security and mentioned the impact that AI may have on the legal field, and to be strategic when planning their careers since some may not be needed as much anymore. The last thing he mentioned was the importance of being sure about pursuing law, and to think about the amount of work and long-term commitment it will need you to have.

Overall, these interviews gave me a much clearer and more realistic understanding of the legal profession. Speaking with two attorneys in different areas of law showed me both the variety within the fields and how different they can be and the more common challenges that all types of attorneys face, no matter their specialization. Ken Haber's passion for his job reinforced my interest in legal work and that it's important to choose a specialization that I am passionate about. Albert Strazza's conversation emphasized the importance of people skills, adaptability, and long-term planning. These interviews helped clarify what I need to remember when pursuing law and encouraged me to think more intentionally about the type of legal career that would best align with my values and goals.