

## **Into Your Genius: Exploring your Imagination**

### **A Lawyer Blueprint for Well-Being**

By Donusia Lipinski\*\*

Our Imagination is possibly the most potent faculty we possess because with this gift, anything is possible; and without it, nothing is possible. Many know about our Imagination, but we completely underestimate its power to transform our lives. In fact, our imagination is the architecture of our future. I believe that imagination is, in many ways, what makes our lives worth living. There is saying that I love which is that some people live one year 90 times while others live 90 years.

As children, we used our imaginations and dreamt that we were astronauts, doctors, teachers, singers, scientists, bus drivers, nurses, or dancers or teachers. I remember I did. But then, as we get older, our dreams get squashed and die as we are told, to 'grow up'; or to "act our age"; to 'not be so silly' or "stop dreaming". Sometimes those dreams were just ignored.

Each one of us is brought into existence to live a life of joy, fulfillment, and abundance. Yet often, we are conditioned to settle, to dream small (or worse, to not dream at all), and to let outside circumstances and conditions dictate the course of our lives. Sadly, many people live their entire lives believing that their circumstances have complete control over their results. They live without a vision.

Let me share a story about the importance of having a dream, how using my imagination, and getting in action, got me to law school. After getting my degree in elementary education, I lived and taught for a brief period in Mexico. When I returned to the States, I did not have a clear vision of what I wanted and so I applied for a job as an autoworker in the Twin Cities, where we built Ford Trucks. I became a member of the UAW. It was an eye-opening, educational experience that woke my advocates' heart.

This was in the mid 70's. I was a paint sprayer and ended up with polyps on my throat, fingers that wouldn't open in the mornings because of the work, and when they thought I was an agitator, they put me at the end of the plant, putting kerosene on the hoods of trucks, which caused me to get kerosene burns on my legs. I was threatened at a rally we organized. I will never forget "Hank" who timed me when I went to the bathroom.

We filed a complaint with the Labor Relations Board against Ford Motor Company for unfair labor practices and the Union for not standing for us. I went to the hearings and was fascinated with the process. I was hooked. Who would have imagined that working at Ford Motor Company would be the match that lit the fire of my desire to become a lawyer?

I applied and was accepted at Golden Gate University in San Francisco. My then boyfriend, told me that he didn't think I was 'logical' enough. That message fed my own fear, stayed with me. Undeterred, there I was ... driving my little Honda across country, with all I could fit in my little car. I didn't know **how** it would all work out, where I was going to live, how I would pay for it, whether I was smart enough, or logical enough... I just knew I had to do it. I had a dream. My imagination went wild as I pictured myself like a modern day "Norma Rae" kind of labor lawyer.

That was over 40 years ago. I share that with you as an example of imagination, a vision, of doing what I could, with what I had, from where I was, standing firm in the face of fear, and fighting all my paradigms that shouted at me "You are not good enough"; "You are not logical enough", "You are too old", "You are not smart enough". "Who do you think you are?" My self-image was sometimes shattered. Maybe some of you hear those voices even now. I know that I do, though not as often or as loud (usually) as they used to.

However, that dream that came into fruition through the power of imagination, from having a clear picture of what I wanted - seeing it, feeling it, living from that vision. Having a creative imagination and moving forward in the direction of my dreams, have landed me where I am today. It has not always been easy; however, it sure has been worth it. All of you here, also had a vision and imagined a life where you would serve as an immigration lawyer.

We are inspired by the work of our colleagues, who dared to dream big; who imagined a better world; who used their creative imaginations to think outside the box, and using the mental faculties of their mind, reason and will, changed the trajectory of our country.

However, just having a fire in your belly, alone is not enough to create a life you absolutely love in 1) your health and well- being, 2) in your relationships; 3) in your life's work or creative expression, and in 4) your time and money freedom. You need to take steps in the direction of your dream. It is not always easy or comfortable when we grow, and expand, but there is no price to be placed on living from that vision.

The American Bar Association, the American Immigration Lawyers Association, law schools and bar associations across the country recognize the urgency of creating 'well-being' programs specifically for lawyers, as the number of lawyers who are committing suicide, who are burnt-out and depressed, who are demoralized and looking to prescription drugs and alcohol to dull the pain.

### **A Lawyer Well-Being Toolkit:**

In response to a 2016 survey, by the American Bar Association, evidence showed that the number of lawyers who suffer from sleep deprivation, suicide, job dissatisfaction,

depressive disorders, work-life conflict, and work and alcohol/drug addiction was on the rise. In 2018, the ABA commissioned a Well-Being Toolkit for Lawyers [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer\\_assistance/ls\\_colap\\_well-being\\_toolkit\\_for\\_lawyers\\_legal\\_employers.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer_assistance/ls_colap_well-being_toolkit_for_lawyers_legal_employers.pdf) In response to the question regarding why lawyers need a well-being toolkit, Anne Bradford, the author of the Toolkit said:

Being a lawyer is an immense privilege. Our law degrees give us opportunities to contribute to the vitality of our government, business sector, community safety, and individual lives. Ideally, lawyers design and create structures as real and as important as architects, engineers, or builders that allow “human beings to live, interact, and prosper.” We help others navigate the law to enable them to build the world they want to live in. As John Williams Davis, an American politician and lawyer, said, “True, we [lawyers] build no bridges. We raise no towers.... [But] we take up other [people’s] burdens and by our efforts we make possible” a peaceful life in a peaceful state.

To serve these crucial functions, many lawyers work extremely hard and take on hefty responsibilities that often have major consequences for clients. The demands that flow from this privilege can mount and threaten our well-being. When we ignore signs of distress, the quality of our work and lives can plummet.

Well-being cannot be defined just by the absence of illness. It encompasses a positive state of wellness. From a whole health perspective, it can be viewed as a continuous process in which we work across multiple dimensions of wellness. The report of the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being<sup>1</sup> identified six dimensions that make up full well-being for lawyers:

1. **Occupational:** Cultivating personal satisfaction, growth, and enrichment in work; financial stability.
2. **Emotional:** Recognizing the importance of emotions. Developing the ability to identify and manage our own emotions to support mental health, achieve goals, and inform decision-making. Seeking help for mental health when needed.
3. **Physical:** Striving for regular physical activity, proper diet and nutrition, sufficient sleep, and recovery; minimizing the use of addictive substances. Seeking help for physical health when needed.
4. **Intellectual:** Engaging in continuous learning and the pursuit of creative or intellectually challenging activities that foster ongoing development; monitoring cognitive wellness.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer\\_assistance/ls\\_colap\\_well-being\\_toolkit\\_for\\_lawyers\\_legal\\_employers.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/lawyer_assistance/ls_colap_well-being_toolkit_for_lawyers_legal_employers.pdf)

5. **Spiritual:** Developing a sense of meaningfulness and purpose in all aspects of life.

6. **Social:** Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support network while also contributing to our groups and communities.<sup>2</sup>

As attorneys, we have a duty to act competently. This arises from the American Bar Association Model Rules of Professional Conduct. Rule 1.1 which state, “Competent representation requires the legal knowledge, skill, thoroughness and preparation reasonably necessary for the representation.”<sup>3</sup> Rule 1.3 requires diligence in client representation, and Rules 4.1 through 4.4 regulate working with people other than clients. Minimum competence is critical to protecting clients and allows lawyers to avoid discipline. However, we cannot act competently if our lives are falling apart, and we do not know where or how to restore vitality so that we can live a life with more grace and ease.

The ABA put out a call for excellence. Minimum competence will not enable lawyers to live up to the aspirational goal articulated in the Preamble to the ABA’s Model Rules of Professional Conduct, which calls lawyers to “strive to attain the highest level of skill, to improve the law and the legal profession and to exemplify the legal profession’s ideals of public service.”

### **Using your Imagination as a tool to add to your Lawyer Toolkit for Well-Being**

The ABA Toolkit was designed to help lawyers and legal employers improve well-being holistically and systemically. In its introduction it says that “***This goal will require new choices, considerable effort, and changes that likely will upset the status quo. Positive change agents might meet with resistance—including complaints that there is no room, time, resources, or need for change.*** This Toolkit offers reasons for prioritizing lawyer well-being as well as information, strategies, and resources for implementing a plan for positive change.” (*Emphasis added*)

One of the most powerful tools at our disposal to change our lives is the power of imagination. Albert Einstein said:

***“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there will ever be to know and understand”.***

Everyone has the power to change their results and live lives they absolutely love living. We bring the power of imagination into our lives every day. “Happy are those who dream dreams and are ready to pay the price to make them come true”. *Leo Jozef Suenes, Clergyman*

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<sup>3</sup> Model Rules of Professional Conduct, *American Bar Association*, Rule 1.1, Competence.

Napoleon Hill, author of the classic, “Think and Grow Rich” said “**Imagination is the most marvelous, miraculous, inconceivable, powerful force that the world has ever known**”. What an amazing statement! He calls “Imagination – The Workshop of the Mind”. Napoleon Hill was born into poverty in 1883 and yet achieved enormous success as an **attorney** and journalist. He was an advisor to Andrew Carnegie and Franklin Roosevelt. With Andrew Carnegie’s help, he formulated a philosophy of success, drawing on the thoughts and experiences of a multitude of rags-to-riches tycoons. Hill devotes a Chapter to Imagination. It is the Fifth most valuable tool of the thirteen he lays out in his book.

Imagination is the Workshop of the Mind. It is literally the workshop where all plans created by human beings, are given shape, form, and action through the aid of the imaginative faculty of the mind. We can create anything that we can imagine. Where do you think things like cell phones, or the internet, your toothbrush, drones, the chair you sit on, cars or electric lights came from? How about the hair dryer, or jets or rockets? It all came from the imagination before it was created in form.

Your imagination will sit there doing nothing until you call it into action, and then it will do whatever you ask it to do. You can build a picture of yourself doing anything. You can build a picture of yourself making a powerful closing argument before the Immigration Judge; or going on that vacation to the beach in Hawaii with your family; or having a family reunion, seeing everyone sitting around the Thanksgiving Table. Imagine opening all your credit card statements and seeing zero balances. Imagine seeing yourself in the mirror, looking vibrant, healthy, and toned; loving the person who is staring back at you.

Everything is created twice! We know this! We just don’t know the power of it. Everything we are surrounded by in the room we are in, was first a thought. If we want to know the predominant thinking in our mind, all we have to do is look at our results. The good news is that if we do not like what we see, we hold the keys to change it.

There are absolutely no limits to creating a life you would love. So just for a minute, consider what you would love and ask yourself: **What would I love?** We may find it challenging to create a blueprint for a life we would love, because we start trying to figure out, “Well, how is that going to happen”, and we began to kill the dream before it even has a chance to be fertilized, to grow.

If we simply survive, we have nothing to look forward to and no joy in our existence. Imagination is what changes that reality. Imagination allows us to set goals for ourselves and dream of a life better than the one we are living. Imagination is more than just fuel for goals and achievement.

Look at these four areas of your life and notice where you feel a longing for something different, or a discontent, a dissatisfaction for what is currently in your life.<sup>4</sup>

1. What is your dream about your own Health & Well-Being? What would you love in this area?
2. What is your longing in the area of Love & Relationships? Where is your discontent? If you built a dream around your relationships, what would it look like?
3. How would you like to express you in the world? What is your dream in your creative expression or your work in the world, your Vocation?
4. When you think about freedom and flow in the financial and material realm, what's your dream? What do you long to do if you had more time? What would it look like if you had more freedom about what you would do or be or express if time was not a limiting factor?

**Tools for Creating a Life you Love:** Life is seeking a freer, fuller, expanded version of itself by means of itself. It's up to you to notice and make welcome what you'd love in your life.

**1. Use your imagination.** Call upon your imagination to think in terms of specifics. What's important to you? Then write it down.

If you keep breathing for 365 more days, you're going to have results in four areas of your life one year from now. So, when you write down your goals, you strengthen the image of your goals in your mind, which helps you to communicate more effectively with the infinite side of your nature. This will help you generate more ideas for HOW to bring about your dream or goal.

**2. Notice your longing and discontent.** Your feelings of longing and discontent are two sacred signals from your soul. If you long for something, you want something to shift or change in your life. Feeling discontent shows up in a form of dissatisfaction with your current circumstances. You may say things like, "I'm tired of being stressed about money," or "I hate going to bed alone every night."

Once you have written down your goals and looked closely at the two signals of longing and discontent, then do what you can with what you have, from where you are. You can only control an exceedingly small part of your life, but you CAN control who you choose to be every single minute of every day.

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.bravethinkinginstitute.com/about-us> Mary Morrissey, Founder of Brave Thinking Institute

So how can you be a better version of yourself today than you were yesterday? Notice the big and small opportunities for success in your life in each moment.

**3. Hit the refresh button.** You're not alone. There's a power within you that's breathing you and seeking success. This power sends you signals of longing and discontent so that you can create an image of what you would really love in your life.

Once you use your imagination to think of what you'd love, write it down, and listen to your longing and discontent. Then hold the image you've created in your mind. Believe that the power of love knows how to bring your dream about. Practice bringing love into your daily life and make today a success, moment by moment.

When you focus on taking 100% responsibility to build success one moment at a time, before you know it, you'll turn around and see that you've had a successful week, and then a successful month, and eventually, a successful year. Success is something that's in you right now and it's as unique as your fingerprint or your soul print.

So, if you ever have a moment that you forget, become distracted or feel that you're not moving in the direction of success, all you must do is hit the refresh button and start over.

If we simply survive, we have nothing to look forward to and no joy in our existence. Imagination is what changes that reality. Imagination allows us to set goals for ourselves and dream of a life better than the one we are living.

Imagination may be one of the most powerful forces on earth, but it is also one of the most often stifled. Many people ignore their own imaginations because there is something in them that whispers, "I could do more," and they lack the belief that that is true.

It may take some time to get comfortable with the idea of pursuing our imagination's goals. Some people say, "You do not know my imagination; it is wild!" Wild imaginations are what get things done.

Do you think the person who imagined the first moon landing was thinking in the paradigm of the day? That goal seemed far-fetched and unattainable, maybe even "wild," until it was accomplished.

Now when we look back, it seems as if we should have always been going to the moon.

Imagine a person with a lamp in her hand moving around in a dark room. She knows that there is an electrical outlet close by and she searches for it diligently.

Why?

Because she is confident that when she plugs in the lamp, she will receive light, and everything will be clear.

In some ways, that is how imagination works as well. We may not always see everything clearly at first, but we can move towards our goals with confidence that everything will become clear once we plug-in to the power that is available to us.

Move with confidence towards the things you want. Working with, instead of against, the Laws of the Universe, you can achieve anything!

In the *Science of Being Great*, Author Wallace Wattles states:

“There is a Principle of Power in every person. By the intelligent use and direction of this principle, man can develop his own mental faculties. ... [T]here is an inherent power by which he may grow in whatsoever direction he pleases and there does not appear to be any limit to the possibilities of his growth. ....

Life without progress becomes unendurable, and the person who ceases from growth must either become an imbecile or insane. The greater and more harmonious and well-rounded his growth, the happier man will be.

We are here to grow! Our Imagination is possibly the most potent faculty we possess because with this gift, anything is possible; and without it, nothing is possible. Most of us know about our Imagination, but we completely underestimate its power to transform our lives. Our imagination is the architecture of our future.

Dare to Imagine! “Dreams are today’s answers to tomorrow’s questions.” Edgar Cayce. “A vision is not just a picture of what could be. It is an appeal to our better selves, a call to become something more.” Rosabeth Moss Kantor, Business Professor and author.

Go forth and Dream Brave Thinkers! Create that Vision. You are all more capable and more powerful than you know! Dream Big!

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