



## **I Did It! Now What?!**

Barring some spectacular failure, this will be my last Manual as a law student. I am in my last term of law school and will graduate on December 20th. Wow!

Going to law school had been a dream of mine for years. I had actually taken the LSAT three times, not because I didn't do well but because my scores expired twice before everything came together and I was able to follow my dream. In other words, I had been working, on some level, toward going to law school for something like 13 years before I actually made it happen.

In 2008, while I was a part of ASMP's Strictly Business 2 team, I got the letter that not only was I accepted, I had been offered a full scholarship, including books. And part of me panicked. Suddenly, this thing that had been a dream became not only possible, it was being handed to me like a gift! Now I had achieved my dream and I was going to have to live up to it!

I started classes and loved being a student. I worked harder than I ever had in school before (and I had already been a grad student) but it was a joyful work. And a week before I took my first set of law school exams, my marriage imploded. When I took my tests, I could hardly concentrate. And when I got my grades, although I had done okay, I knew that my scholarship was in jeopardy. I hit a bump and I could have given up right then--no one would have blamed me. Second term, I would have to pull a miracle to keep my full ride.

I chose to try. I worked even harder in some ways, but definitely smarter in others. Rather than try to be a part of a study group, which never felt like me, I trusted myself to study the way I knew how. And when I got those second term grades, I had done it. I saved the scholarship.

Every term since then, I've had to make grades, and I have. I've even made Dean's List and got a perfect grade in one class. I have done it, and done it well.

Why am I sharing this story? Because it is a good model for success and what that brings with it. Someone once said "Be careful what you wish for--you just might get it" and I think that attitude informs how we approach success. We all have dreams--what happens when you achieve your dream? What happens when you are successful?

You have to BE successful.

That takes work. It means not just sitting back, but rather leaning forward. It means doing more, not less. And it can be intimidating.

Seth Godin recently wrote about intellectual laziness in business today. I think he really nailed something there. It's easy for people today to say to themselves, "That takes too much effort"

or “I’m content the way things are.” We look for juicy rationalizations to permit ourselves to not do rather than to do. It’s safer to sit on your laurels than to risk by trying for more. Better to be “content” we tell ourselves.

Only it’s not. A friend of mine recently said “Being content is not good--humans need to move, to progress, to grow, and being content is just sitting. Muscles atrophy if they aren’t used, and if we don’t keep trying to reach new goals, we atrophy, we die a slow death.” He was right. And he told me that when I had a moment of panic about graduation. He reminded me that I needed to take the next steps, to try to be more than I had been, even though I had achieved this fabulous goal.

He said, essentially, “It’s great you’ve done what you’ve done and you have every right to be proud of yourself. But don’t just sit on your ass now. What are you going to do to top it?”

My first instinct was to be a bit miffed. I mean, hey, let me revel in my success a bit. But then I realized what he meant. If I let myself revel, it would be damn easy to get stuck and not move forward. That would be a waste. I choose to move forward, with gusto!

Think about that guy or woman you went to high school with. You know exactly whom I mean... the one who was the big man on campus then or Homecoming Queen and who still lives for that time. The one who contacts you on Facebook and says “Remember that time in High School when we \_\_\_\_\_” but who hasn’t done anything significant since. That person is the poster child for this problem.

Don’t be that person in your business. You’ve been a success so far in your business (remember, if you’ve ever shown a profit, you’ve been a success!), and that’s great, but you may be resting on your laurels. Time to move.

Here are some signs you aren’t pushing yourself enough:

- You are doing essentially the same work you were five years ago;
- You are working for the same clients (mostly) as you were a few years ago (or more);
- You have trouble finding something you did that feels worth a media release;
- You don’t feel like you could ask for the rate you know you should ask for;
- Your portfolio and/or website contains mostly images you think you are *supposed* to show (rather than what you want to show);
- You haven’t shot for yourself in 6+ months;
- You haven’t shown work you shot for yourself in recent memory;
- You haven’t felt really excited about your work in recent memory (or longer);
- Your best stories are about shoots that happened more than 2 years ago;
- You complain about technology more than you talk about its possibilities in your art;
- You complain more about lots of things related to your business;
- You don’t call what you do “art.”

What can you do to change this? Easy. Anything. Do something you haven’t been doing. Push yourself. Try something you may suck at and do it just to try it. Take what you learn from the

experience and apply it to the next thing you try. Re-find that dream you had tucked away and try to do it again. If you've achieved a dream, dream again and dream bigger, then go for it.

Just don't get stuck and stay there. You owe yourself better than that. You chose to be a creative professional--stop trying to be that and play it safe. Take risks! Fail big! Do whatever it takes.

I have faith you can do it, too.

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My newest book, *Business Basics for the Successful Commercial Photographer, 2nd ed.* is now available on [Amazon](#) and [Lulu.com](#). It would make a great gift for the assistant or photo student or newbie businessperson in your life.

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To learn more about Leslie, check out the Burns Auto Parts website at [burnsautoparts.com](http://burnsautoparts.com) where you'll find links to the *Super Premium* blog, *Creative Lube* podcasts, as well as more Manuals and other info. Leslie also shares info on Facebook at [facebook.com/burnsautoparts](https://facebook.com/burnsautoparts). You can contact Leslie directly via [leslie@burnsautoparts.com](mailto:leslie@burnsautoparts.com).

Please note: Leslie will not be working with any new clients until after she takes the Bar Exam in late February.

