

# The Entrepreneur's Edge: Seven Essential Elements for Legal Leaders

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## Summary

- ❑ Discover the Seven Essential action areas every lawyer with big goals needs to know.
- ❑ The Seven Essentials will help lawyers build their brands, expand their professional influence, and combat imposter syndrome.
- ❑ Get action steps, book and tech recommendations, and more actionable advice from an expert coach, lawyer, and entrepreneur.



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In a profession where precedent often carries more weight than innovation, lawyers who want to build unique, fulfilling careers need to approach things differently. If that sounds like you—if you have big ideas that haven't yet taken shape, this article offers guidance drawn from my own experience.

The secret to exceptional success often lies in doing things not just better, but differently. The mindset that drives innovation isn't reserved for startup founders or tech CEOs—it's for anyone hungry to build something original, especially within a profession that is built on tradition.

Based on more than 30 years as a lawyer, coach, entrepreneur, and business development expert, I've developed what I call the Seven Essentials. These are the core principles that help lawyers like you, at any stage of your career, create the opportunities you want. This article describes the Seven Essentials, along with practical actions, inspiring quotes, book and film recommendations, and two simple ways to begin the process.

*"You are built not to shrink down to less, but to blossom into more. To be more splendid. To be more extraordinary. To use every moment to fill yourself up."*

—Oprah Winfrey

## 1. Big Energy: Big Goals Need Big Energy

*"The energy of the mind is the essence of life."*

—Aristotle

Picture your brain in the morning as a full coffee mug, rich with energy and focus at the start of the day. In those early hours, you feel sharp and motivated.

But then come the distractions. You start scrolling—social media, news headlines, a bit of chatter on the radio during your commute. And without meaning to, you've already drained a good portion of that mental fuel before you've even opened your laptop. Your attention gets scattered, pulled by things designed to grab you like clickbait headlines.

Then, as your energy drops, your willpower drops with it. You get through the day more or less successfully, but you don't have the ability to focus on other things in your life that need your attention. Envision a forest: You're always focusing on the trees in front of your face, when what you really need to look at is the entire forest with a sharp bird's-eye view.

The key thing to remember? This isn't a weakness at all; it's biology. Your brain only has so much to give, and when you leave your "attention residue" on things that aren't that important, that depletes the energy left for the rest of the day.

**Action Step:** Identify your "power hours"—that golden window when your focus and drive are at their peak. Whether you're a morning person or an evening owl, know the best time to tackle the most demanding tasks on your plate. At the onset of your power hours, don't think—do. Start with the hardest things on your list; don't leave them for later. Indeed, you might be surprised how much better you feel about yourself when you hit those most challenging projects first.

**Action Step:** Be intentional about your morning routine. This includes delaying checking social media or news headlines, which are intentionally designed to stress you out. Instead, swap the news and social feed for an audiobook or podcast that adds to your energy, not robs you of it. More on the Essentials of educating and elevating yourself below.

**Tech Recommendation:** I'm addicted to my Oura Ring to help me calibrate my day. It tracks sleep, movement, and even hints when I might be on the edge of getting sick.

## 2. Branding: Design Who You Want to Become

*"Brand yourself for the career you want, not the job you have."*

—Dan Schawbel

Most lawyers are so caught up in the day-to-day demands of their work that they rarely take time to think about who they want to be. Instead, reputations take shape by happenstance, largely defined by projects they're given, roles they're slotted into, or habits and culture around them. You might not even be sure what your professional brand is, and that's common.

It's worth taking some time—starting now—to think clearly about who you are, what you stand for, and the kind of person you want to grow into. Words can create your world, so choose some that inspire you.

**Action Step:** Jot down five to 10 qualities (or more!) that define the person you want to be. Common traits I hear from the attorneys I coach? Words like "influential," "powerful," "rainmaker," "community leader," and "wealthy" (which they define in many ways). A great way to start is to think about someone you admire—whether it's a colleague, a mentor, or even a public figure. What is it about how they carry themselves, speak, or work that

resonates with you? Identify those specific elements and make them as tangible as possible. The more granular you get, the easier it will be to start practicing them yourself.

**Action Step:** Now go shopping for physical elements that reflect the person you want to be. Using your list of inspiring attributes, pick out a few clothing pieces or office items that reflect this upgraded version of you. A quote I love: *"When you buy quality, you only wince once."* Invest in the best pieces you can afford. Sites like The RealReal offer designer consignment, and Rent the Runway lets you rent luxury items you wouldn't otherwise buy outright. Notice how your confidence shifts when you wear or surround yourself with things that elevate you.

**Book Recommendations:** Stay inspired by reading about the big lives of amazing people. A few recent reads (or audiobooks) I've loved: *Let Love Rule* by Lenny Kravitz, *Ali: A Life* by Jonathan Eig, *Steve Jobs* by Walter Isaacson, *The 50th Law* by Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson and Robert Greene, and *Be Useful* by Arnold Schwarzenegger.

### 3. Bragging: Eliminating Imposter Syndrome

*"If you don't toot your own horn, don't complain that there's no music."*

—Guy Kawasaki

*"It's not bragging if you can back it up."*

—Muhammad Ali

Most of us were told early on in life not to brag or be a show-off. That message stuck, and over time it shaped the way we viewed ourselves. Now, even as successful professionals with advanced degrees, we tend to downplay our work and the effort we put into it. We also rely too often on external approval to feel good about ourselves.

And here's the real kicker: The worst part isn't just that no one recognizes your work as much as your ego craves that validation, but that you start downplaying your own efforts in your own mind. You internalize the false modesty, along with the lack of external affirmation, and before you know it, you're questioning your worth: maybe you're a fraud, an imposter, or just not as good as some of your colleagues. That self-doubt doesn't stay put either—it starts mutating. Suddenly, you're not speaking up for yourself during a meeting or an important negotiation. The insecurity creeps in, subtle at first, then it spreads like a slow-moving infection.

So, what's the antidote? Bragging. Yup, you heard that right.

It's not the loud, insecure kind that makes everyone cringe. I'm using the word "brag" that is related to Bragi, the Norse god of poetry, music, and eloquence. Bragi was invited to feasts and gatherings because he brought creativity and celebrated achievement.

Effective entrepreneurs own their value and achievements. They do this by focusing on how they wish to be of service and having their actions and energy reflect their love for what they do. They are good at what they do because they are passionate and love talking about it—which takes practice.

The battle with imposter syndrome isn't one that may disappear completely, but bragging will help soften its impact by letting you celebrate your achievements. To do this, however, you need to develop a daily practice of acknowledging and rewiring yourself as described in the following action step.

**Action Step:** Start a "Wins" journal, or what I prefer to call it, the "Why I Am Fabulous" journal.

Each day, jot down one to three things that made you feel particularly proud and fabulous—could be a work win, something you did for someone else, or time you spent with your kid. Something you wore or something you ate (or didn't eat). That you went to the gym, that you tried a new route to work, that you paid someone a wonderful compliment, or that you donated to a charity you care about. They can be major, or fairly small but significant for you. Hey, it's your list; put on it what makes *you* happy.

Getting started with this exercise can be tough—almost everyone I work with hesitates at first and says, "I don't have anything to brag about." But that's never true. Once they begin to dig in and uncover the wins they've forgotten or downplayed, those first small examples turn into a steady flow. What starts as a trickle quickly becomes an irresistible and inspiring stream.

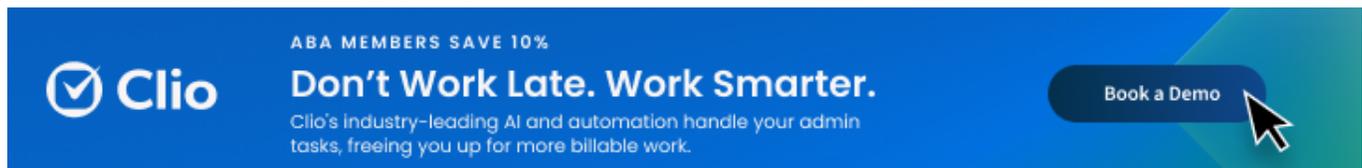
Doing this exercise will literally rewire you from the inside out. Science proves that the physical act of writing helps cement in your brain what you are writing about, so by creating this journal and acknowledging yourself in it, your brain is literally changing and rewiring into a new, more confident you.

What is also special about this kind of journal is that it becomes a highlight reel of the wonderful things in your life and the small moments you never would have remembered.

**Action Step:** Go buy a beautiful journal today and start your own "Why I Am Fabulous" journal. Write down in it even just one thing that made you really great today (it could be just that you started the journal!).

**Action Step:** When out with friends, family, or colleagues, trade a brag or two. Notice how you're learning things about the other person you may have never known or noticed before, and how it feels to share things that you otherwise would have kept mum about.

**Action Step:** In your next team meeting, try a round of business-related brags, with each person sharing a recent win. It breaks the ice, boosts morale, and is surprisingly insightful because not only do you learn more about your colleagues, but it can also spark ideas for cross-collaboration.

A blue and green banner for Clio. On the left is the Clio logo (a checkmark in a circle) and the word "Clio". To the right of the logo, it says "ABA MEMBERS SAVE 10%" in small white text, followed by "Don't Work Late. Work Smarter." in large white text. Below that, in smaller white text, it says "Clio's industry-leading AI and automation handle your admin tasks, freeing you up for more billable work." On the right side of the banner, there is a dark blue button with white text that says "Book a Demo" and a white mouse cursor icon pointing at it.

## 4. Influence: Expand Your Impact

*"The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, . . . to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well."*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

When it comes to building influence, it usually comes down to three main pieces:

- 1 Client care and service
- 2 Networking
- 3 Thought leadership

All are important and, although distinct, work together to help you create the career and life you want.

First, client service. That includes not just your clients, but anyone you work with: senior partners, board members, general counsel, or internal teams. Most lawyers I know are strong here.

Second, your network. Are you continually building relationships and expanding your network? That could mean going to networking and legal bar organization events, joining community organizations, and taking a few minutes every day to thoughtfully comment or connect on LinkedIn.

Third, thought leadership. Where are you writing, speaking, and volunteering? Where are you showing who you are and what you stand for?

**Action Step:** This week, sign up for one networking event, or sketch out a rough idea for a thought leadership piece. Check out a local professional group or industry event and just get something on your calendar. Notice how this makes you feel.

**Action Step:** Give your LinkedIn profile a quick glow-up. Refresh your “About” section, add a “Featured” item, connect with five new people with a short personalized note, and drop a couple of thoughtful comments on posts for people you’re connected with.

**Book Recommendations:** For a dose of inspiration about how to elevate yourself and everyone around you, I highly recommend *Setting the Table* by Danny Meyer (founder of Union Square Hospitality Group and Shake Shack, and pioneer of the “enlightened hospitality” concept in the restaurant industry), *Excellence Wins* by Horst Schulze (cofounder of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company and leader in defining luxury hospitality service standards), and *The Leader Who Had No Title* by Robin Sharma. The audiobooks are excellent as well.

**Tech Recommendation:** If your brain is overflowing with ideas, I recommend the reMarkable 2 tablet. I’m addicted to mine. It helps me track thoughts, save must-read PDFs (the Chrome extension is a lifesaver), and organize the chaos across my different worlds—work, writing, family, big ideas, even my wish lists—and of course my own “Why I Am Fabulous” journal.

## 5. Rock and Roll: Add Some Punk Rock

*“Love, creativity, and opportunity is in the air. Take it in and do your thing.”*  
—Lenny Kravitz

*“Being a rockstar is the intersection of who you are and who you want to be.”*  
—Slash

Lawyers are taught to value precision, intelligence, and ambition. These things help us do well, but they can also wear us down. The pressure—especially with billable hours—adds up. We start to lose parts of ourselves under deadlines, work demands, family needs, and the constant push for the next achievement.

Now’s a great time to add a little punk rock and see what shakes loose.

**Action Step:** Read the prior article I wrote on this subject for this publication, [“Tap into Your Inner Spark with the Punk Rock Principle.”](#)

**Action Step:** Do something this week that your spirit keeps calling for. It could be painting, visiting a museum, writing a poem, riding your bike, taking a hike, cooking something new, or going out dancing. Dancing in the kitchen or while getting dressed counts too. If you don't have time for a museum, visit a gallery near your office or even just look at art in a gallery window. If you can't leave your desk, pull up a museum website—the Louvre has short video tours, including a fun one related to the epic Beyoncé and Jay-Z music video filmed there.

## 6. Education: Chase Knowledge

*"If you're not learning, you're falling behind. Somebody else is getting better while you're becoming complacent."*

—Carla Harris

Entrepreneurs are insatiable learners, always thinking, *What's next? What can I do better?*

For lawyers, the job is demanding and the pace often relentless, so there's not a lot of space or mental energy left for curiosity.

But here's the secret: You don't need chunks of days; you just need slivers of hours. I'm a huge fan of "Travel University"—turning commutes on public transportation, drive time, walks, or even folding laundry into time where I am intentionally growing. My personal routine is listening to personal development-related books on my way to the office as part of my power hour routine as I charge up for my day, and then I treat myself to an entertaining bio on the way home.

**Action Step:** Pursue knowledge with gusto. This includes staying on top of trends in not only law, but technology. Study artificial intelligence and trends in that space. One publication that you might appreciate in this vein is [Fast Company](#), which covers innovation, leadership, technology, and design, including business profiles, trends, and innovations. Let me know how you like it.

**Book Recommendation:** One book I absolutely loved: *Unreasonable Hospitality* by Will Guidara. Guidara walks you through how he turned his restaurant, Eleven Madison Park (originally part of the Danny Meyer empire in NYC), into the #1 restaurant in the world by creating little moments of unique magic.

**Tech Recommendations:** Audible, Kindle, Blinkist, Libby. I carry around libraries of ideas and inspiration in my pockets, and you can too.

## 7. Elevation: Design Your Incline

*"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage."*

—Anaïs Nin

*"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take."*

—Wayne Gretzky

Elevation starts with intention, so think about where you actually want to go in your career and in your life as a whole. Don't just keep your fingers crossed and hope things work out, because life speeds by when you're busy.

What are the things that you really want to have, do, and become? Do you want to teach, write a legal treatise (or novel), or start a side business? Do you want to hike the Camino Trail or become a yoga instructor? Volunteer at a local food bank or start your own nonprofit? Get another degree? The world can be your oyster once you decide what genuinely excites you and lights you up.

**Action Step:** Make a "Desire List": Write down everything you want to do, experience, or create in the next 1, 5, 10, and even 20 years. Visualize where you live, how you spend your days, who's around you, and what feels meaningful.

One tip: Think about what you *want*, not simply what you think you *can have*. They can be very different lists, don't you think? Whatever it is that you *want*, write it down and notice how that makes you feel.

**Action Step:** Turn that list into something visual. Create a physical vision board—cut out images, pin them, tape them, glue them. There's something wonderfully powerful about turning ideas into pictures and putting them on paper or tacking them on a board. If you'd rather create a version online, head to [Canva](#). They've got vision board templates, and you can search for images—or even generate some with AI right in the platform.

Then hang it somewhere you'll actually see it—yes, even your office.

**Action Step:** Take one tiny step toward your dreams by doing something related to the pieces on your "Desire List" and vision board. Maybe it's registering for a class, signing up for a conference, or window-shopping for your dream home. That one action can shift your mindset and mood because suddenly it feels just a bit more real—because it actually is.

**Movie Recommendation:** *The Greatest Showman* starring Hugh Jackman, Zac Efron, Zendaya, Michelle Williams, and a gorgeously diverse cast of other actors. One of the best business and professional development movies ever.

## Where to Start

Don't know where to start from all the concepts above? Here are two potential jumping-off points:

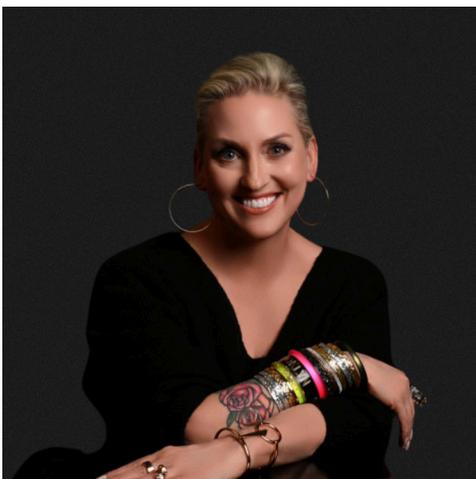
- 1 What lit you up the most? When you read over the pieces above, which one made your eyes gleam and your ears perk up? What made you feel the most energized and excited? There's your easy answer.
- 2 What did you dislike the most? If none of the above sounded exciting, may I respectfully suggest that you start with the Essential that was the least interesting to you. For some of you, that could be the "Why I Am Fabulous" journal, and I know this because I've had clients say, "No way I'm doing that." But once they tried it, it became addictive and their favorite. Embrace the resistance and experiment to see what fun may lurk on the other side of your "no way."

One last parting quote to inspire you to start playing with these Seven Essentials:

*"If you go to work on your goals, your goals will go to work on you. If you go to work on your plan, your plan will go to work on you. Whatever good things we build end up building us."*

—Jim Rohn

### Author



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