

YOUNG LAWYERS

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AN ARGUMENT WITH CONFUCIUS

“Choose a job that you love, and you’ll never have to work a day in your life.” Confucius said it. We’ve all heard it. We’ve even repeated it. But personally, I am not sure about it, especially as it applies to young lawyers.

First, loving your job is nice; but it is equally important to love your profession. Being a lawyer is not a job, it is a profession. Where you work is your job. This seems obvious enough, but it’s important to distinguish, because oftentimes I hear young lawyers say, “I like/don’t like being a lawyer,” when they really mean, “I like/don’t like my current job.” Not liking or loving your current job does not mean that you cannot love a job in the profession; it means you have not yet found the right job. When you find it, that is when the real work begins.

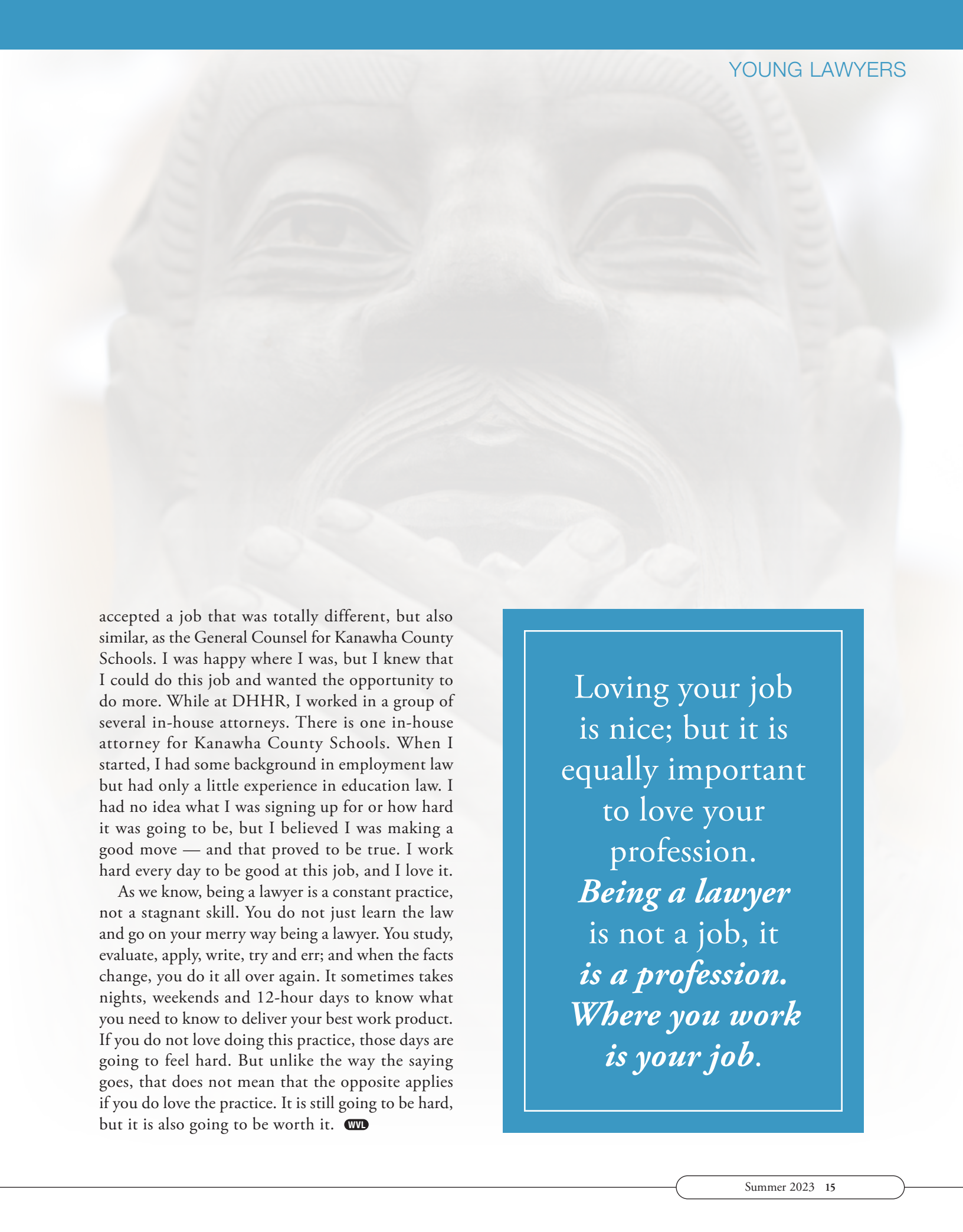
When I first started working as

a lawyer, I thought that I would be at my first job for a long time. I saw my mother stay at the same job and grow in that job for 25 years. There were times she did not love her job, but I knew she found value and worth in what she did. When I became unhappy in my first job, I struggled coming to terms with leaving because I had not yet recognized the distinction between loving your job and loving your profession. Questions like “Am I a failure?” and “Should I still be a lawyer?” stayed on my mind. I have seen other young lawyers struggle similarly and leave the profession entirely. I almost did too. This profession is not one that attracts a lot of people who are used to failing, and I dealt with it by almost coming to a complete stop.

I eventually left that job

and accepted another job as the Assistant General Counsel for the Cabinet Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Resources. There, I spent five years learning health care law and using that knowledge to direct hospital policy, advising in litigation and legislation. About two months into this job, I discovered my love for the counseling part of being a lawyer. In order to advise people internally, you have to know applicable law and policy, but also the ins and outs of the agency and its issues — which I loved, because I got to talk to people and problem-solve. I learned that eight hours at work can move quite quickly when you do not have time to watch the clock. But I also learned that I was capable of working so much harder than I had been.

I left DHHR because I



accepted a job that was totally different, but also similar, as the General Counsel for Kanawha County Schools. I was happy where I was, but I knew that I could do this job and wanted the opportunity to do more. While at DHHR, I worked in a group of several in-house attorneys. There is one in-house attorney for Kanawha County Schools. When I started, I had some background in employment law but had only a little experience in education law. I had no idea what I was signing up for or how hard it was going to be, but I believed I was making a good move — and that proved to be true. I work hard every day to be good at this job, and I love it.

As we know, being a lawyer is a constant practice, not a stagnant skill. You do not just learn the law and go on your merry way being a lawyer. You study, evaluate, apply, write, try and err; and when the facts change, you do it all over again. It sometimes takes nights, weekends and 12-hour days to know what you need to know to deliver your best work product. If you do not love doing this practice, those days are going to feel hard. But unlike the way the saying goes, that does not mean that the opposite applies if you do love the practice. It is still going to be hard, but it is also going to be worth it. **WVL**

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