

Rites of Spring... Cleanup and Rejuvenation

By [Joseph B. Altonji](#) on April 2, 2013

Spring is here. The first quarter is over. And while we haven't yet seen first quarter numbers it's clear that they will reflect "more of the same." Firms doing well are probably continuing strong, and those not doing so well? They are continuing... perhaps minus the tax-driven boost in work that some saw in the fourth quarter of last year.

Spring is here. Last week I spent Spring break with my family – with enough downtime to step back and think more about the big picture. The conclusion? The big picture remains decidedly problematic for many. The winners (i.e. those experiencing regular, year over year increases in demand for their services) are doing fine, even great, but the losers? How long can firms continue to drag along, trailing the market? Sooner or later they need to **DO SOMETHING!** Inertia and indecision are critical progress killers in many firms. We can't do anything because it's just too hard to do *anything* important. So paralysis prevails and drift results, and firms continue but don't advance. Change is hard.

Spring is here. This is the traditional time for cleanup and rejuvenation. We put our yards through Spring cleanup and our houses through Spring cleaning. We rip out old, dead bushes and plant new shrubs and gardens. We touch up the paint and clean out the attic. What about our firms? Maybe now is the time to develop a tradition of "law firm spring cleaning." What if firms made it a habit to systematically review their operations, people and practices at least once a year, and clean up the problem areas? For the successful, high performing firms this could lead to even better performance. Even in the best firms, there are often out-of-date practices and procedures that got started for some reason long ago. Why do they still do it that way? Can they stop? And for the weak firms, it could be a matter of survival. Time to part company, in a respectful and humane fashion, with those people who no longer fit (lawyers, staff, etc.). Time to purge the leadership ranks of ineffective practice leaders who never really did the job but wanted it as a symbol of their importance. Time to evaluate the service delivery practices across the board and reengineer them for more efficient, cost effective client services. The list could go on indefinitely.

Spring is here. What would our firms look like if we actually stepped back and, once a year, thought about what to let go of and what new things to advance? Maybe we would have fewer firms continuing to drag along in the "loser" category. Maybe these firms would succeed in turning things around before they get to the crisis point and instead begin to see a brighter future. Their best lawyers would be more wedded to the firms, their profitability would grow, and their internal culture and morale would both likely be far better than before. And for the firms that are already doing well, there is the potential to really take their firms to a new level. "Can Spring Cleaning" become a fixture of the law firm world? Hard to say, but getting into the habit of periodically, and systematically, cleaning out old baggage and bringing in new processes and thinking can only lead to better outcomes for all.

For firms who have seen consistent lags in performance, consider our upcoming webinar "[Concerned about another bad year?](#)"