

5-1-2010

## Creating your own destiny

Michelle Pirotta  
*The Write Company*

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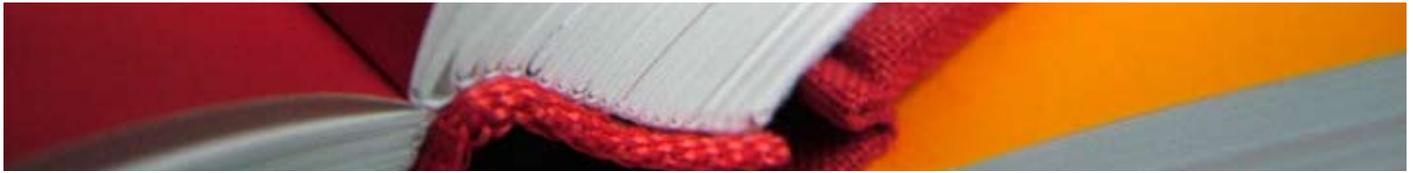
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### Recommended Citation

Pirotta, Michelle (2010) "Creating your own destiny," *Research Trends*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 17 , Article 5.  
Available at: <https://www.researchtrends.com/researchtrends/vol1/iss17/5>

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## Expert opinion



# Creating your own destiny

MICHELLE PIROTTA



At the age of 40, Dennis Weber is already a professor of European Corporate Tax Law at the University of Amsterdam, head of the European Tax Law desk at Loyens & Loeff and a deputy judge in s'Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands.

He is also a regular speaker on European tax law at seminars and

institutions worldwide, holds several directorships, and edits and contributes to various publications.

However, he only entered tax law by a process of elimination: he knew he did not want to work with languages, so entered law, which he discovered he was very good at. "When you're good at something, it's often more fun." However, he is keen to point out that success is no accident. "Once you discover your strengths, you need to study hard and set new limits every day."

Yet as a student, he did not set himself long-term career goals. He had a vague idea that he would like to be a top European tax lawyer and maybe get an article published in one good journal. Now he is a professor with 43 journal publications and three books, not to mention countless newsletters and short articles, to his name. "I had no clear vision. You just work hard at things you enjoy, and suddenly you look around and realize that you have succeeded," he says.

He sees himself as primarily an academic, but in most cases there is no difference because the two activities feed into each other. As a legal consultant, he advises from an academic perspective, so the academic feeds into the practical. He then uses case examples for his research, allowing the practical to feed the theoretical.

## Opportunity knocks

Weber actively seeks out opportunities for interesting and useful research. For example, there was a lot of discussion on the most-favored nation principle in EU direct taxation, but no clarity and no answers. So, he set up a test case and took it to the European Court. "I also thought it would be a nice academic project," he adds. He not only got an answer, he was also able to write a paper on the case.

He says: "Sometimes you hear people complaining that they need an organization to research a particular subject. I believe you have two choices: wait for someone else to start an

organization or start one yourself. I always say that anything is possible if you try. And, this is what I did. I helped set up the Group for European and International Taxation and the EU Tax Law group. I'm the general editor of *Highlights & Insights on European Tax Law* because everyone was saying we needed a journal like that. And I organize seminars on hot topics and winter courses on international and European taxation."

He has always been an initiator. "When I was a student, I got bored of the parties in Amsterdam, so I started my own. I even had my own magazine. I'm good at organizing things." He was on holiday in Sri Lanka when the tsunami hit, so he raised money to help. "It seemed the obvious thing to do," he says.

Academics also need to work on boosting their visibility. "If you do research but nobody knows about it, it is useless," Weber says. "Build your network and make sure people receive your research, even if you have to send it to them."

## Making time for success

According to Weber, to achieve success in European tax law, you must be a critical thinker; have independent and new ideas, or at least be open to them; do excellent research; and always be one step ahead of your peers. You must also have passion for your subject, manage your time carefully and do high-quality research. Seizing opportunities is one thing, but you must have the time to take on dream projects when they do come along.

He says: "Don't waste your time and talent on less important research projects. If you are busy with unimportant work, you won't have time for that big project. I always make time for that."

Weber believes that quality is far more important than quantity in research, and much more likely to lead to success. This is why he deliberately sets time aside for the important questions. "You get more attention if you write about important topics, because you will initiate debate."

## Packed social life

Perhaps not surprisingly, Weber approaches his social life with the same energy he gives to his professional work. There is some overlap: he travels a lot for work, which is also a hobby. "When I travel for work, I always go out – to bars, restaurants. Tell me a city and I will tell you a good restaurant; the last one was Caprice in Hong Kong – amazing. I am also lucky to have a strong social network with my family and friends."

But he is too busy living his life for one pastime: television. "Why would I want to watch other people's lives? It is better to live your own life, isn't it? To create your own life and your own opportunities."