



Life is a Mess

Recently, I was required to sort through 20 years of practicing law to complete forms, questionnaires, inquiries and an assortment of other invasions of privacy. What I learned is that my life is a mess. I lamented to my mentors about my quandary. Their response, “Ernie, why do you think you are so special as to have your life in order? Every lawyer’s life is in disarray in one way or another.”

Some lawyers have problems meeting deadlines. Others have problems meeting clients’ demands. Meeting unreasonable calendaring, docketing and orders that our judicial sisters and brethren direct our way can be a problem. Most lawyers are poor business people, hence, the need for law office management software and seminars. Some lawyers are poor communicators (for example, remember the guy on the law review whom none of us have heard from since law school graduation?). If put to the test, we can all discern our inadequacies.

Many legal education programs have a lawyer or judge lambaste (sometimes through the magic of videotape while he/she is out on the golf course) or condemn our professional practices. If we could only be as perfect as the talking heads claimed to be! Hopefully, in the last year, we’ve moved away from being adjudged guilty by professional membership. Generally speaking, our profession requires us to improve.

But for legal training, lawyers and judges are no different than others. We all have our problems. Our spouses might be disappointed in us, our children impatient with us, our pets disgusted with us, etc.,

but most of us try to improve. Some have marital problems, tax problems, health problems, car problems, relationship problems or problems recognizing our own ... problems. We mandatorily, continually and legally educate ourselves to refine our legal skills. However, what do we do personally to improve our lives?

We should strive to improve and recognize that life will be imperfect.

Our answer usually is to search for a seminar someplace on a beach, boat or back porch to help us rehabilitate ourselves.

For a moment, let me respectfully suggest a revolutionary idea. Let’s take a moment to accept those imperfections that we cannot change, the courage to change those imperfections that can be changed and to ask for the wisdom to discern the difference. Yes, this is not my original idea. Any 12-step veteran will recognize the formula. But if we don’t spend time mending and reinvigorating, we won’t be worth much to anyone we serve.

We are all imperfect. Let’s deal with it.

It’s how we deal with it that really counts. In my religious tradition, I was taught to follow a guy who was born in a manger. A manger is a feeding place in a stable. A stable is a small barn. Have you ever walked in a poorly kept barn? Your boots are bound to get soiled. I believe the birth in the manger was purely intentional. It’s symbolic in that our lives are messy ... like the barn. In my tradition, we are unconditionally accepted despite our mess and imperfection.

As lawyers we should strive to improve but we should also recognize that life will be imperfect. Isn’t that why clients come to us in the first place? Clients seek our help because their affairs are not in perfect order.

Wouldn’t you much rather hire a lawyer who has made a few mistakes, appear before a judge who doesn’t make immaculate claims and cohort with others who are also imperfect? There is too much pressure to stand in the aura of a self-proclaimed saint.

Those of you who know me will undoubtedly agree that I have a lot to be humble about. My life can be a mess. But the other day a colleague came up to me to say how proud he felt that another “low life” like him could be our bar president. That was one of the best compliments I’ve ever received. ¡Adelante! ▀