



Time for a Change

Lawyers are set in their ways. As a group and as individuals, we resist change perhaps more than anyone else.

You have to fight that logical mind and conformist disposition to remain open to new ways of finding success. The alternative is to be the sort of dolt who never learns from experience.

We are also set in the belief that our way is the only way. I don't know if this particular mindset is attracted to the law, or if law school and the legal process make us this way. But I do know that we can be pretty inflexible across the board. And I know that this inhibits our growth as human beings.

In law school we are taught to think like a lawyer, which I guess means to think logically. This is fine, and it's also pretty, well, logical, but it's not the only or even the best way to think. Losing your temper doesn't make much sense. Crying generally doesn't further any goals. But they are normal reactions that may actually be the best response to a given situation. Falling in love isn't too logical. Nor is chasing dreams or trying new and different things. But

maybe sometimes that's what life is all about.

Politicians often follow what the political scientists call First Success Theory: For their entire careers they repeat whatever brought them their first victory. Many lawyers do the same thing. But how you won that first case in 1981 or 2001 may have little relevance to how a particular case should be handled today. You have to fight that logical mind and conformist disposition to remain open to new ways of finding success.

In politics, changing your mind about things makes you a flip-flopper. But for the rest of us, it's really OK. The alternative is to be the sort of dolt who never learns from experience.

Do you prepare and answer interrogatories or write contracts or wills the same way you did 10 years ago? It's hard to believe you have an open mind if you can't find something that can be improved upon after a decade of work.

Maybe you need to re-evaluate what it means to prac-

tice law. Maybe you need to be in a bigger firm or maybe you don't need to be in a firm at all. Maybe you need to work more hours or, more likely, maybe you need to schedule more time to do things you like outside of the practice of law. If you don't schedule it, it won't happen. And if you don't figure out how to do things other than play lawyer, you will miss a good deal of what life has to offer.

I think we need to understand that lawyers become predisposed against change. We must fight against it, and constantly look for better ways to practice, to serve our clients, and to live life more fully. As illogical as it seems, in the long run change is almost always good.

A friend of mine in another state left the bench and began negotiating with law firms who wanted him as a partner. He surprised them by saying that he wasn't going to work on Fridays anymore. He became suspect to several of the firms, but one of them agreed to his demand. For the past five years, he has worked hard Monday through Thursday, but never on Fridays. Every weekend is a three-day weekend. Holidays are four days.

It was a new way of thinking, but he actually enjoys practicing law now. More important, he enjoys life.



Grant Woods is a trial lawyer in Phoenix emphasizing complex litigation, plaintiff's personal injury, and government relations. He was Arizona Attorney General from 1991 to 1999.

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