

should invigorate us, as every day carries the prospect of doing something great for someone else.

Our process is an adversarial one. But adversarial need not mean personal. If we keep that in mind and recognize that all of us are the same type of person, just on opposite sides of the “v,” we can begin to recapture the professional civility and consideration that once defined the art of advocacy and the practice of law. ■

PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Message to Newer Litigators: Don't Just Wait by the Phone

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Always—always—answer your phone. But never sit around waiting for it to ring.

Three distinct times in my so-called adult life, answering the phone has changed the trajectory of my career. And in between calls, I've looked for any way I could to keep moving forward on my own.

Exactly 30 years ago, on a Saturday during my last year of law school, the phone rang in my Gainesville, Florida, apartment. It was an obnoxiously early hour. I'd spent the night before at a watering hole with classmates, working out our frustrations over many pitchers of beer. My voice was all rasp.

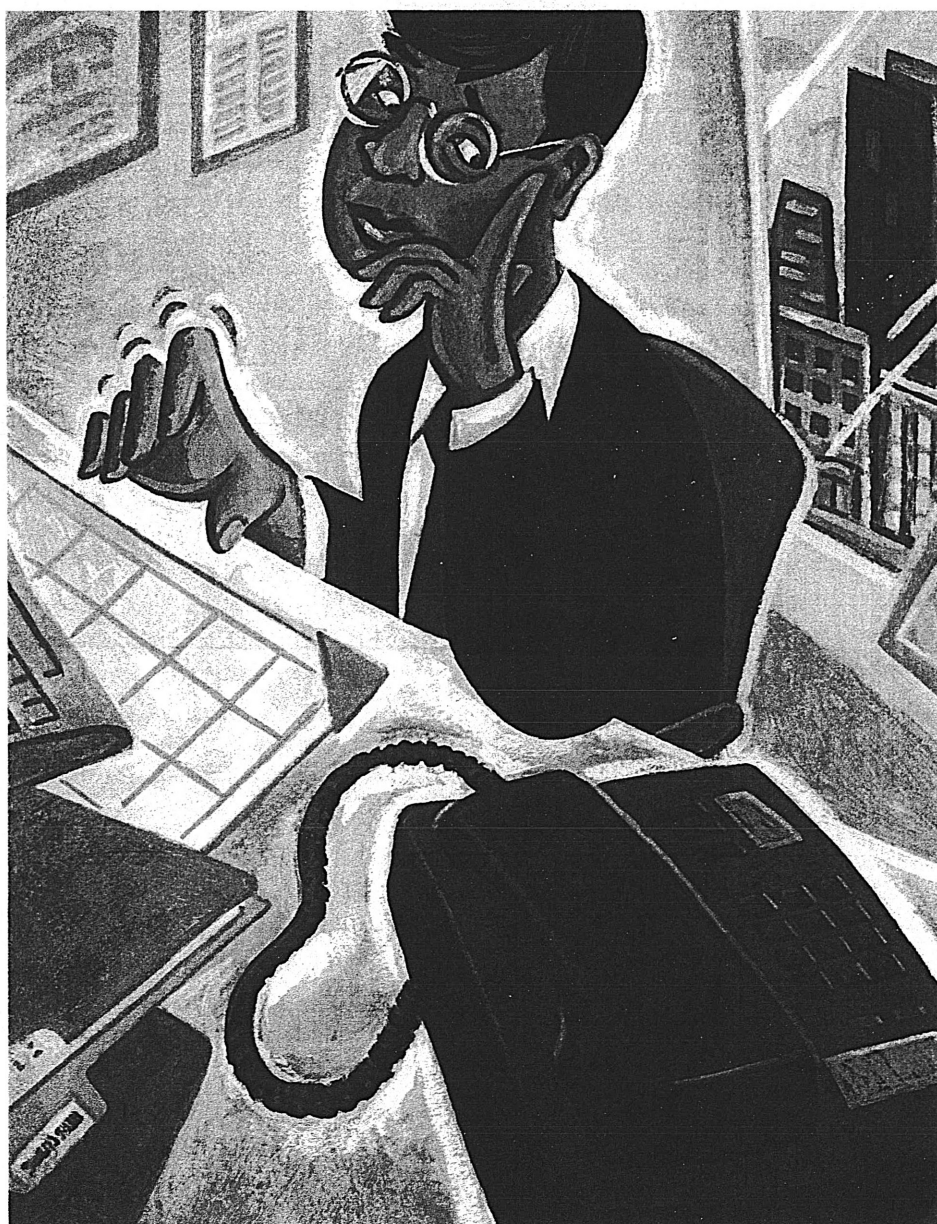
The owner of the upbeat southern accent on the other end sounded as if he'd been up for hours. “Chuck, this is George Gabel in Jacksonville. I was just going through today's mail at the office. [Did I mention this was a Saturday?] I saw your nice letter and

résumé. Would you like to come over and visit with me tomorrow [on a Sunday]?”

That fateful call led to a lifelong mentorship and dozens of my first appearances in court. George, now retired after an epic career as rainmaker and kingmaker, was one of those lawyers who made success look absolutely effortless. Clients flocked to him, judges waited on his every word, jurors nodded like bobbleheads when he argued. He chaired every group that mattered—and many that didn't. Except to the participants. And that mattered to George. He was the perfect first role model for any young lawyer.

In my fourth year at George's firm, the phone rang again. “Chuck, this is Barbara Wall.” I put down the accident-reconstruction report I had been studying. Barbara, now the chief legal officer for newspaper publishing company Gannett, at the time headed its in-house litigation group at the company's Northern Virginia headquarters. I was a summer intern there during law school, and Barbara and I had remained in close touch.

Gannett had just created a position for an in-house litigator, and it was exactly the type of First Amendment-focused work that I'd gone to law school for—defense of



defamation and privacy cases in the dozens of states where Gannett's newspapers and TV stations operated. I knew I had to take the position.

Eight years and 23 states' worth of pro hac vice appearances later, I returned home after an eight-hour flight. Before I put my bags down, the phone rang, and I ran to answer. It was a partner at Holland & Knight who headed the firm's media practice in Tampa. He was in D.C. for the night. Would I like to have dinner?

I was totally spent, but we had known each other a long time. And being gracious to the outside counsel who served our company was one of the countless lessons that Barbara—the second terrific role model I've had the incredible fortune to work for—had taught me.

So just an hour later, I found myself at the Palm in downtown Washington, D.C., enjoying cocktails with my Florida friend. He leaned in and said, "Well, are you ready to give up corporate life and come to work with our firm?" And so I did, setting off on 16 wonderful years at the firm's D.C. office, where I helped found its national media practice.

Each of these calls came after days, weeks, years of my concerted efforts to engage with our practice in any way I could. Student meets world. Lawyer meets world. Lawyer flings himself at the world with reckless abandon. CLE conference panels, speeches, committees, guest lectures, articles, lunches, dinners. You name it, I'd do it. I still do.

I don't care how busy a day I've already had or how crummy I feel that day. If a client needs my ear, I will make time to listen. If a colleague shows up at my door with a problem, I will make time to work through it. If a professional association asks me to participate in a program, I will make time to participate. If the editor in chief of LITIGATION asks me to write a column, I will make time to write it.

A client and good friend, CNN's lead in-house lawyer David Vigilante, recently put words to it in a way I've never been able

to: The label "work-life balance" sets up an artificial contest between two concepts that do not belong separated. Especially for litigators who want to stay busy. We need to accept that our whole life is happening all the time.

Compartmentalize? Forget it—that's just not me.

Indeed, I have never missed one of my kids' soccer matches, school plays, debate tournaments, or honor society inductions. I've dropped everything to run them to the emergency room, and I've stepped out of meetings for calls any time they've just needed a minute with their dad.

But my BlackBerry or iPhone has always been within quick reach. And at almost each event, I've responded to a client or firm colleague who needed something quickly. I have even stepped out into the hallway at two different Bruce Springsteen concerts to conduct last-minute legal reviews of scripts for evening news broadcasts. I know: Crazy, right?

I look at it this way: People honor me when they ask me to do stuff. They trust me with their worries. I should honor them back by responding when it's important to them, not just when it's convenient for me.

And I continue to get so much more than a career out of this line of work: I have made some of the most fabulous friends anyone could ever have. Real friends. Lifelong friends. Not simply "work" friends.

As I labored in Jacksonville to overprepare for my earliest court appearances, Tim Conner, now with Holland & Knight and still one of my closest pals, sat right next to me. When I wanted to do something completely different for my 50th birthday, I reached out to my longtime buddy Dave Giles at E.W. Scripps, and we traipsed across Europe to see Springsteen in Prague. Carolyn Forrest at Fox Television and I have mentored each other through our terms as chairs of the ABA Forum on Communications Law; I will never attend a media bar gathering,

or spend time in Atlanta, without trying to see her and her lovely husband, Tim. At pivotal moments when I need fresh perspective and superb judgment, Kelli Sager at Davis Wright Tremaine has always been my trusted big sister in our bar. For years, my kid sister in the bar, Laura Prather at Haynes & Boone, and I have found shared work and social opportunities, and we regularly text with relish about each of our kids' milestones.

Answering my phone also has helped me spot the best emerging talent. I make time for law students whenever I can—you should too; we all remember what that insecure time was like. Responding to their calls, getting to know them, and ultimately introducing them to my partners led to the brilliant hirings of associates Drew Shenkman (now in-house at CNN) and Adrianna Rodriguez (now in-house at Univision). Both are steadily becoming known as energetic and superbly creative leaders of the next generation of First Amendment lawyers while ensuring that the press remains free in this time of enormous challenges.

Just look at where answering my phone has gotten me now. Phoenix-based superstar litigator David Bodney, whom I've known for decades, called five years ago to invite me to an evening of jazz in New York City before a CLE event. That began an annual ritual and an even closer bond that led me to call David in 2017 and ask about combining practices. We are in our second year as co-leaders of Ballard Spahr's Media and Entertainment Law Group—and now neither of our phones ever stops ringing.

If you want to succeed as a litigator, don't artificially separate your "work" from your "life." Let them intertwine instead.

Just be sure that when I call, you answer the phone! ■