

Odd – for a non-joiner

By Mark Petrucci

For most of my life I have been a non-joiner. I saw no benefit in becoming part of a larger group on more than an ad hoc basis. I was not into team sports. I did not have extracurricular interests. I never had the desire to join school clubs or societies. An explanation for my lack of involvement boils down into four significant reasons, and a lot of little ones not worthy of mention.

I was born with a pronounced *Bradydypus Osteotitus* aka lazy bone. Joining something means taking an affirmative step and it requires effort, and effort really troubles someone who suffers from this disorder. Moreover, there was/is no cure yet discovered that mitigates the condition.

The second hurdle was apathy. Apathy may not be the best word to use, but I could not find one that better fits my complete lack of caring about any issue. Early in my life I decided that I knew what type of person I was. Some people claim they are optimists, – others, pessimists. I believe I am a romantic realist. I always want things to turn out right; I just assume that they will not. Hence, any issue general enough to have a group or organization that was accepting members just did not raise my blood or stir my passion. If an issue or cause did attract my attention, my earlier-mentioned condition helped seal the deal against getting involved. Furthermore, I believe that holding something too passionately is actually dangerous. A passionate belief is too close to fanatical belief, and I have never been fanatical about anything (including OSU football.)

My third roadblock came from my love of history. Reading about thousands of years of human conflict helped to develop my inordinate distrust of all the ways in which humans organize themselves. Be it absolute monarchs, democracy or republics, people continue to make the same mistakes over and over. The only difference I saw in the modern/current world, was that the effects of our repeated mistakes are on a larger scale.

The final reason was an off-the-cuff statement by my dad when I was a freshman in high school. We were stuck in traffic behind a car that had a few bumper stickers. I do not remember what the bumper stickers said, but I do remember that if you read the message, you knew what the owner of the car felt about certain issues. My father said, “Why would someone want to label themselves?” Oddly, that struck me as a profound statement, and until I had kids, I never had a bumper sticker on my car. (I now have one associated with my child’s gymnastic team.)

Yet here I am – the president of the Columbus Bar. How is it possible that someone with all my baggage got here? Here’s my best explanation.

When I passed the bar, my father accepted me into his one-man practice and gave me, as he liked to put it, marching orders. The first was to join the Columbus Bar. Since it was an order, I followed it without question – never asked him why. In the brief time I spent practicing law with him, I came to learn why.

At one point, my father said that membership in the CBA was the best way to meet your professional colleagues and a great way to “get your name out there.” I did not know it at the time, but that was, and remains, a truism. I was able to figure out on my own that he believed it is a duty to the profession to be a member of your local bar. He felt that way and so do I (but paying dues does not mean that I have a bar bumper sticker on my car.) Coincidentally, at the same time I received my marching

orders, there was a push by the Ohio Supreme Court to enhance/support/maintain the professionalism of the bar. A new professionalism creed was being discussed, and the CBA had a committee on the subject. The popular refrain at the time was that the “young lawyers” were ruining things and the profession needed to address the issue. I knew that the term “shyster” went back to the 1800s and the term “pettifog” was coined possible as early as the 1600s. Furthermore, the profession had already been eviscerated in the classic *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World; By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of several Ships*, now more commonly referred to as *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift. That work of art was published in the early 1700s. Noting history, I was able to draw the conclusion that the fall of the profession’s good standing could not be attributed to just my generation.

On behalf of all young lawyers, I had a great desire to poke the established bar in the eye, so I decided to go to the next scheduled professionalism committee meeting. I showed up with a fire in my belly and a hope that my romantic side would win out over my realist one. I am not sure I remember the meeting, but what I do remember – and always will, was that the committee was led by Frank Ray, who was its chair.

Working with Mr. Ray and meeting and working with Alex Lagusch shook my belief that all human organizations were destined for failure. To my eyes the CBA was, and still is, nimble and quite capable of addressing issues as if it has the heart of a startup business. It clearly has aged well. And my dad’s statement about meeting people was proven true. I met, discussed, debated and argued the issues that came before the committee with some of the leaders of our profession. It was truly heady stuff for me – a kid with no law firm behind him and just a couple of years of practice under his belt.

The years went by and like the proverbial camel’s nose under the tent, the CBA not only got my dues, it got my time and commitment. I was inside the tent. I had really bought in before I realized it. With each additional commitment I took on, I found more opportunities to broaden my prospects and to help my profession. The association brought into my life some of the most challenging and rewarding work I have ever performed. My work with the CBA, and the people I have met and befriended, have all enhanced my life. I had found the cure to my laziness and my apathy.

So, like many late-in-life converts, I have become and continue to be a fanatic supporter of the Bar. I have grown to personify the old saying: “in for a penny, in for a pound.” I got involved, and I am so glad I did. Take the opportunities that the Association gives you and make the Columbus Bar your professional alma mater. There is no better school out there.



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