

## President's column

# The Firm

Here's the thing about plaintiff trial lawyers – we have egos. Yes, often big egos. There is a reason for this. We have to be ready and able to take hard hits. We need thick skin. We must be resilient. We don't have time for self pity (at least not too much). We have to be strong enough to bear the burdens of our clients and to charge forward on their behalf. We are always fighting against the odds. And so we are a profession of strong personalities.

Yet we have become an anathema.

The insurance industry in particular has set out to destroy the reputation of trial lawyers. They belittle our honorable profession and encourage bigoted stereotyping of our members. Their distortions are largely accepted by a jaded public. Through their deceptive lenses, instead of seeing our strength of will and dedication to achieving justice - they see superficial caricatures of despicable manipulators.

Our egos are strong enough to withstand heavy beatings. But we have to be able to put them aside to acknowledge that as a profession – we are generally loathed.

Now the insurance industry was not creative enough to figure out how to destroy our reputations all on its own. Instead it has followed the ugly tradition of oppressors through history – those who have employed the strategy of “dehumanization” to whip up the prejudices of the public so they can annihilate the opposition.

The Holocaust of World War II and the Rwandan Genocide have both been cited as atrocities predicated upon government-organized campaigns of dehumanization, while crimes like lynching (especially in the United States) are often thought of as the result of popular bigotry and government apathy. Anthropologists Ashley Montagu and Floyd Matson famously wrote that dehumanization might well be considered “the fifth horsemen of the apocalypse” because of the inestimable damage it has dealt to society. When people become things, the logic follows, they become dispensable - and any atrocity can be justified...

The empirically supported propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky shows how corporate media are able to carry out large-scale, successful dehumanization campaigns when that promotes the goals (profit-making) that the corporations are legally obliged to maximize.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dehumanization>

So long as we do not take affirmative steps to “humanize” ourselves, the bigotry will continue unchecked. We must stop “looking like lawyers” outside of the professional arena. We must get out of our offices and into the public domain. We must stop feeding into stereotypes and must instead break them. We must view ourselves as people first and lawyers second. Just as we show juries that our clients are worthy, we must show our communities that we are good and honorable citizens.

To illustrate the “re-humanization” process, I offer up my law firm (no – they haven't seen this article before today). Here we are, in a picture all together mugging for the camera. We look like a bunch of lawyers. Everyone is wearing a suit. The picture itself does not change the stereotype. But a short explanation can. We'll go from left to right.



Kevin is the whirlwind, intense, Italian. He cannot sit still – not for even a moment. He is Kinetic Kevin. He likes going to his clients' homes and knows everything about them.

Paul is the lion hearted leader who puts his clients' needs before everything else. His “lists” are legendary, his thoroughness unparalleled, and his ties always match his crazy socks.

Brad is intense and a tad solemn except when he's swinging his golf club in our waiting area. He gives the appearance of being fairly laid back but that all changes when Kevin gets him going.

Garth is actually laid back. He is even keeled. It is nice to have a calm person in our midst. Me, you know all about.

Paul W. is Mr. Erudite. He can say so much in so few words. Everyone in the office goes to him with their troubles. He likes to work out problems with kindness.

J.D. is the social butterfly. He truly likes people and is always making friends. Since coming to the firm, he has wrested from Paul S the title of being the most sartorial splendid.

Keith is the pacer. He walks back and forth over every square inch when holed up in a room. Perhaps it is because he is a piano player and his feet are doing what his fingers are itching to do.

Ray is the brilliant one. When in doubt, we ask Ray. The best part of Ray though, is watching him smile. His smile is smart – it only appears when it is meant to.

When I hear bigoted attacks on trial lawyers, I am outraged on behalf of my firm and on behalf of my bigger family of WSTLA. As fighters for justice – we are used to taking up the gauntlet for those we champion. But when we are personally attacked, we just sit there and take it.

We must reclaim our good names. We must celebrate and proclaim the wonderful personalities that comprise our trial bar. No one else can do this for us.