



From the President
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Be like the Romans...and the Greeks

PAIRING ROMAN AND GREEK VALUES IN OUR INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES AND OUR OCTLA COMMUNITY

As we have now settled into our mid-year pace (echoing last month's metaphor), we are feeling good about what we've accomplished in the first five months of the year. We look forward with anticipation to what lies ahead. In the meantime, however, we must beware complacency. As leaders of organizations, law firms, and litigation teams we cannot rest on our laurels. Celebrate our successes, yes. But stop, no.

Success can be as distracting as failure is disheartening. The sweetness of victory or the bitterness of defeat can yield the same result: waning motivation, participation and discipline. I would argue that now is the time of year to take steps to avoid becoming untethered by celebratory revelry or mired in the throes of defeat. Everything is fleeting, both success and failure. It's never as bad as it may seem, nor are things always as great as they may appear.

Yet, it's not about motivation. It's about dedication. Pep talks, private meetings, podcasts and any number of motivational strategies can be deployed to enhance engagement and participation. Yes, do all that stuff. Consider also, however, some wisdom and lessons from the ancient Romans and Greeks. After all, they went big (OCTLA theme of the year). In fact, they went *really* big, for a long, long time.

To be sure, I am no philosopher or historian. Yet, I have always been fascinated by ancient Roman and Greek culture and society. Two great nations with two completely different definitions of "greatness" and means of achieving their greatness. As we are in the trenches of our work, we can learn from the values and principles which made the ancient Romans and Greeks great.

The Romans, for example, above all, valued "duty to country." In other words,

the individual mattered, but it didn't matter the *most*. A person's development, interests, talents, strengths and life experience were not the top priority. A brochure about "finding your passion" was not to be found in any Roman university career counselor's office. Why not? Wasn't that important? Yes, it was important. But it wasn't the top priority. What mattered *most* was the Roman Empire. People lived to serve the empire. Everyone served in the military. Education was secondary to military might. For the Romans, if you were good at math, you became a mathematician. If you didn't like math, well, too bad, that was your strength and the empire needed strong mathematicians. By serving the empire, your own life and safety would be secured. Following this approach, the Romans built one of the greatest empires in human history – by systematically placing the empire's interests above their own.

The Greeks, however, were the complete opposite. They didn't care about the empire. Being "great" wasn't about global conquest. It was about magnification of the self. If it didn't benefit them individually, directly, and tangibly, they didn't care about it. They cared about themselves and their lives, first and foremost. Not in a narcissistic way. Well, maybe in a narcissistic way...a little bit. But more broadly, they valued experiencing life as independent individuals and free thinkers. Their individual freedom was paramount. Freedom to act, think and live life on their own terms. From this school of thought, the Olympic games were born. Indeed, Western civilization's greatest thinkers hailed from Greece with the likes of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The allegory of the cave exists for future generations to ponder because Plato was

free to think, and philosophize, and think some more. But, it wasn't all about getting lost in thought. Rather, the Greeks are credited with inventing the world's first known democratic system of government. They valued balance of powers, civic duty and education.

I know, I know. We're not in college philosophy 101 anymore. So, what do the ancient Roman and Greek cultures and values have to do with being a trial lawyer and a leader in Southern California in 2024? Well, the connection is simply this. In our modern era and practice of law, we can be very much Greek-minded, staunchly independent, absorbed in self-promotion, and obsessed with our fitness regimen. These are not bad pursuits. In fact, they are mostly good pursuits. But I would argue that they are best paired with a dose of Roman values. Loyalty to something bigger than oneself. A dedication not just to our own firms and our own clients and individual success, but to the organizations, systems and infrastructures which facilitate and promote our individual success. Organizations like CAOC, CAALA, OCTLA, ABOTA, LATLC, OCTLC and many others.

And so, as the spoils of victory pile up for this year, I encourage everyone to give back to their local TLA community. Speak at an MCLE seminar. Author an article for the Advocate or Gavel publications. Upload documents to the document banks, share your knowledge on the listservs and recruit new members to our cause.

And so, be like the Romans by supporting your local TLAs generously and often. And be like the Greeks in mastering of your craft, pursuing your education and claiming your freedom.

