



From the President
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What is success?

HOW DO YOU MEASURE IT?

In the plaintiff's bar, success often has a single definition: maximizing the recovery for a client. Whether that goal is best achieved through settlement or trial is up to each attorney, client and each individual case. The "rules of engagement" for litigation are generally no-holds-barred. In fact, this mindset is generally embraced so wholeheartedly that ethical obligations and civility guidelines have been promulgated to prevent parties from going too far – dropping the proverbial atomic bomb on their opponents.

To me, representing a client is about restorative justice as Aristotle would say. It's about taking action to restore a loss suffered by a human being. A lawsuit is neither a battle, war, sport or game, although often, these analogies may help an attorney cultivate the mindset necessary to expend significant effort in pursuit of their client's interests. Indeed, the inherent pressure of litigation with discovery, depositions, experts, expenses, trial and the ultimate risk of financial gain or ruin will generally bring every case to a boiling point, culminating in resolution.

But the question remains: What is success? We've often heard phrases like "success breeds success." We all want success. We may even be envious of those who we perceive to be more "successful" than us. Indeed, "success has a thousand fathers, and failure is an orphan." But that doesn't define success. In the dictionary, the definition of success is similarly amorphous. It is defined as "a degree or measure of succeeding" or "a favorable or desired outcome."

Of course, it would be naïve to ignore the fact that financial gain is often tethered to the concept of success.

However, in this article, I would challenge my readers to ask themselves what success means for themselves. What is the "favorable or desired outcome" you are looking for? Not just on each case, but in your practice as a whole, in your career, and beyond your practice and career. How can personal pursuits enhance your career and your representation of your clients?

When I was in college, my goals and ambitions were academically oriented. I didn't have much of a vision beyond the immediate exam, semester, or graduate school. At the time, I had a narrow view of success: good grades, peak physical fitness and, hopefully in the future, financial reward. My roommate at the time challenged me to broaden my definition of success. He asked me, "What is success?" Is it freedom? Independence? Happiness? Vengeance? Knowledge? Marriage? Children? A family? Money? Cars? Houses? Legacy? Philanthropy?" My response was, "Yes, all of those things." He then responded, "But what about after that? After you have achieved all of that, then what?"

I had no response. I couldn't see beyond my immediate perception of success and its stereotypical definition. I hadn't taken steps to define success for myself. Indeed, one person's success may be taking care of an elderly parent or family member. Another's may be athletic excellence. And yet another's may be financial gain. It's important to remember, that none of these definitions is right or wrong.

Should vs. would

A therapist once told me "should" is someone else's "would." In other words, she challenged me not to think or act as someone else would, but how

I wanted myself to. "Should" is wrapped up in values and beliefs of society or others. "Would" is self-empowering. I am going to take this course of action because it is what I want. It is what I believe will bring me what I desire. I am willing to expend time, energy and resources in pursuit of this desired outcome. Steve Jobs famously said once that his goal was never to be "the richest man in the cemetery." Rather, he wanted to change the world and the human experience through innovation.

One of my favorite movies is *The Count of Monte Cristo*, adapted from the book by French author Alexander Dumas. It is a tale of a man, Edmond Dantes, falsely accused of treason and wrongfully imprisoned. Years go by as he battles his sanity in prison. He wonders if his legacy or his life has been completely forgotten by those who knew him. Had they moved on? Did they forget about me? By a stroke of luck, Dantes escapes prison on the deserted island Chateau D'If and returns to France. On his way, he discovers pirate treasure, making him immeasurably wealthy. Yet, his desire remained elsewhere. He wanted revenge. He wanted to clear his name and make those who wrongfully imprisoned him pay for their crimes. In the end, Dantes achieves his goal. He exacts his revenge and reunites with his long-lost lover and son. Yet, it is not just about revenge. It is about hope and resilience too, the intermediate character traits which propelled Dantes to achieving his goal. In his mind, he achieved success.

And so, I would challenge everyone to ask themselves not "what is success" but "what is success *for me*?"

