



MY OPINION

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Observations from the Road

This is my last column and I will soon return to practicing law full-time (that noise you just heard was the collective sigh of relief from my partners). Before I go, I would like to leave you with some things I learned or had reinforced while out on the road this year.

PEOPLE ARE INTERESTING — GET ENGAGED

We fly on planes, attend judicial receptions, and ride a lot of elevators. Interesting people also sit beside us on planes, stand alone at judicial receptions, and ride in the elevator with us. Often, however, we are tired and distracted, placing headphones on when boarding a plane. Sometimes, we are busy and multi-tasking, checking messages and emails and ignoring those around us. If you put your headphones on the second you sit in your chair, talk only to people you know, or stare at your iPhone that has no service in the elevator instead of engaging interesting people, you lose an opportunity. You lose an opportunity to make a connection with a human being or maybe just obtain an interesting story to relate at a cocktail party. Interesting people sometimes need help — sometimes, they even need legal help. So, open up your circle, talk to the stranger sitting beside you (not too much!), and engage in the world around you.

CIVILITY LIVES

Much has been written about the decline in civility in our profession. I tend to disagree. I observed the opposite over the past year. I met lawyers all over the state who value most their reputation for honesty — lawyers who do what they say

they are going to do when they say they are going to do it. I have met numerous lawyers who open up their offices to an out-of-town lawyer — not for a referral, but because it is the right thing to do. My travels across the state have taught me that there are decent, kind, and professional lawyers everywhere, and the public ought to hear more about them.

TEXAS LAWYERS HAVE HUGE HEARTS

Texas lawyers care about Texas citizens. It sounds like a billboard, but it is true. Texas lawyers care about issues that affect all of us — equal access to justice, education, and citizens down on their luck. The Texas Young Lawyers Association focused on these issues in particular this year, bringing the Bar *Partnering for Pro Bono*, *Office in a Flash*, and *The Little Voice*. Information about all three programs is available at www.tyla.org. TYLA also created several new brochures to educate the public about loan modification scams (in English and Spanish), occupational licenses, new employment laws, and homeowner oil and gas issues. TYLA contributed to *Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans* by creating pamphlets for veterans and volunteer lawyers and by participating in veterans' clinics. The lawyers I worked with this year gave countless hours of time to help law students, young lawyers, and the public for one reason: *they care*.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

While lawyers care a lot about the community, lawyers do not always take care of themselves. I started this year talking about balance and priorities, particularly in light

of the extra demands the economy was putting on young lawyers. I knew that it was critical that young lawyers keep perspective as they lost jobs, lost business, and demands increased. Acknowledging this issue, State Bar President **Terry Tottenham** focused on depression with his *Practicing Law and Wellness* video. But, just as things seemed to be improving this spring, within a two-week period, the young lawyer community lost not one but two well-respected and beloved young lawyers to suicide. We may not know or understand what brings someone to that decision, but the last few weeks have reminded us that even those who appear strong and well adjusted may be in need of help.

Part of being engaged means recognizing that you have a support network. If you are feeling overwhelmed, sad, or hopeless, please reach out to a friend or family member. Or, call the Texas Lawyers' Assistance Program at (800) 343-8527 or (512) 427-1453. Help is available. We all need it from time to time.

BE THANKFUL

I can't write my last column without mentioning how thankful I am for the time and experiences I have had over the past year. It has been my pleasure to serve as TYLA president, and the experience has been made all the more rich by those with whom I have worked most closely — **Cori Harbour**, immediate past president; **Natalie Cobb Koehler**, president-elect; **David Anderson**, chair; **David Courreges**, vice president; **Alyssa Long**, treasurer; **Kristy Piazza**, secretary; and **Alfonso Cabañas**, chair-elect. These TYLA officers are the future of our Bar, and that is a good thing. ☆