



Find Someone to Carry

Skills and Professional Development



I had the opportunity to spend two weeks in Europe with some friends many years ago. In addition to taking museum tours, hearing street musicians and sampling delicious food; we experienced a unique, almost daily phenomena. My friend nicknamed it “the lunatic of the day.” Invariably, at some point during a day, we would witness strange behavior from someone we encountered. On the metro, a man stared unwaveringly at one of my friends through our entire ride, which passed eight metro stops. Walking down the street, another friend was pursued for three blocks by a man trying to sell him “gold” jewelry. On a third occasion, a friend was sitting on a street bench waiting for us to get money from an ATM and a man walked up to the bench and relieved himself standing next to it.

Years later as I reflect on these events, they lend themselves to amusing recounts of travel lore; however, at the time, we were quite unsettled by them. When strangers act ... strangely, we cannot help but feel uncomfortable — anxious for the moment when we can “escape” their presence. Eventually, either they move on or we do and the universe’s balance is restored.

But what about times when the uncomfortableness lasts longer than a moment, day or month — or even a year? What if that person isn’t a stranger but a semi-permanent fixture in our daily lives? Recall the college or law school professor who gave assignments as if you were taking no other classes. Today it could be the supervisor who expects you to amicably train your replacement in a company merger, or even the employee who regular ignores your direction and blind copies your boss on every email.

Whoever it is and whatever your situation, it can make life unbearable. I had a friend whose company was “reorganizing.” In the reorganization, a new coworker appointed herself my friend’s supervisor and was a constant source of stress weekly, if not daily. At the time, I honestly could not understand why my friend found it difficult to handle this woman. Then I got one of my own: a self-appointed

“lunatic.” It wasn’t so easy to “build a bridge and get over it” once it became my bridge to cross.

Difficult and uncomfortable personalities in our daily sphere can be more than challenging; they can become debilitating. They can make us doubt our skills, experience, judgment, abilities and even our past accomplishments. How far we have come disappears against the backdrop of pressure and discouragement applied by someone else. I have listened to more than one account from a fellow ACC member dealing with a demoralizing situation. And my advice to her and to my readers is: “You are not alone.” No really, you are not. You have a network of us that either have been or will be where you are right now.

Whether you are riding high in the prime of your in-house career, just starting out as the first attorney for your company, trying to figure out how you are going to find work after the merger, or dealing with your own “lunatic” — you are not alone. You aren’t the first person to be forced to hire your replacement, deal with an angry employee or lose a job. I am sure many of you have acted as cheerleader for a friend, coworker or family member in similar circumstances. Clearly, when it happens to us, difficult moments seem to drag on.

Recall law school and your first Socratic question in front of your peers. You made it beyond that question. You got through finals. You passed the bar. You ARE a lawyer. The pressure gave way to a career. Today’s storm will give way to calmer seas. Don’t forget what life was like before you came to this hard moment which seems to be lasting FOREVER.

This TOO shall pass. It may take a day, a week, a month, maybe even a year but this moment, this difficulty, this person will pass on or grow up. And so will you.

As we connect with our in-house comrades, try to remember that everyone is going through something. One of my favorite images of helping one another comes from the series “Firefly” in an exchange between two war veterans:

Tracey: “When you can’t run, you crawl — when you can’t crawl, when you can’t even do that...”

Zoe: “You find someone to carry you.”

In my first day of law school orientation, the dean (in an effort to instill fear in us) said “Look to the right and look to the left, only one of you will be here in three years.” Today, my revision of this statement would be:

“Look at the person on your left and then look at the person on your right and see if you can find someone to carry.”

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