

Happiness While Practicing Law

By Ralph A. Paolone

A long time ago, my friend Steve Neder told me to play more golf during the week. I told him I would play more when I retired. I then asked him how he did it with his busy practice. Steve told me that he had been a good golfer, (when I first met him in 1988 he was a scratch), and that if he could not play up to his standards when he retired he did not think he would play anymore. He told me to “play while you still can”. Now, in the summer, when I try to play golf at least one day during the week, I often think about that conversation with my friend. If you wait until retirement to do the things you love, it may be too late.

So my advice to you all is to play more golf, shop more, go to the movies, go to your kids’ sporting events, meet your spouse for lunch—do all of these things during your work week. Try to do at least one fun thing every week—during your work week. Go to the beach in the afternoon—even if you bring a file to review, (baby steps for some of you).

I promise you the world will not end if you have more fun. I promise that your practice will not suffer. In fact, I have found that I have become a much better lawyer because I am a happier person. Take your shoes off and take a walk in the grass—feel the grass on your bare feet (as Julia Roberts told Richard Gere in *Pretty Women*). It just may help clear your head.

Another piece of advice along these same lines: Get rid of the “stinky fish” files that are sitting on your floor. You know the ones that I am talking about. You may have taken the file as a favor for a friend. You may have taken the file even though it was outside your area of practice. Ever since you accepted the file, you kept it out on your floor so you could see it. The idea was that if I keep it out, the file will remind me to do the research, or call the client, or the other lawyer. When you leave fish out, it goes bad and begins to smell. **GET RID OF YOUR FISHY FILES BEFORE THEY STINK**, (and you are stuck with all the problems that come with trying to clean up stinky fish files). I do not care how much you are getting paid per hour; the stress and anxiety you experience while the file sits is not worth it. Look around your office right now or look at your file list. Mark the fish. Either get the work done today, (which often times is not as bad as you thought), or get rid of the file. Refer it. Call the client and tell them you can no longer handle their matter. I promise you that the world will not end. I promise you that your practice will not suffer. You will feel instant relief. You will feel happier. Your other clients will be happier for it and so will you.

So fellow members of the bar association, your practice tip this month is to try to be happier! Climb your mountain, coach your high school wrestling team. Do whatever makes you smile and do it today. You will find that you are a better person and a better lawyer.