

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin.

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September 26, 2018

## Frustrations in life of law

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Frustrations abound in life and law.

- The train is either agonizingly delayed, at the expense of my monthly meeting — obsessively gaveled to order on time — or leaves with infuriating promptness when I am held up, forcing me to acknowledge I can no longer cover the five-minute dash to the station in less than seven minutes.
- For the first time in the three plus-year history of the grueling contract dispute nearing trial, the parties are in agreement, yet the judge still rejects our stipulation (“The trial date stands — we’ll take that Thursday (Thanksgiving) off”).
- The vegan daughter, away at college, the one who never listened well, learns from her doctor she is iron-deficient. Rather than take a supplement, she decides the answer lies in more pumpkin greens and collard seeds. Or maybe she said pumpkin seeds and collard greens.
- A supplier client grows tired of the slow-pay tendencies of a significant customer and wants immediate legal action taken. Full payment is secured for the client in a matter of weeks, then the law firm’s bill goes unpaid for seven months.

Most of our plates already overflow with personal and professional aggravation, so why do we round out our days seeking more?

Crosswords. They allegedly provide some cerebral exercise while warding off dementia, and in a relaxing way. Yet when the clue is “Request to a waiter,” and all you know is its 5-letter answer ends with “G,” how can anyone relax?

My usual request for a “single malt” won’t fit. “I know it’s not exactly on the menu, but can you bring me ...”, as the wife usually begins, is too much both for most waiters and for the crossword.

Wait, “Bring”? No, the third letter is probably “M”.

401(k) accounts. As lawyers, we can structure and execute leveraged buyouts for a private equity client, but we are plainly not responsible enough to plan for our own financial futures. So we authorize our firms to raid our paychecks and force retirement planning down our throats.

The thinking goes: It’s less painful to take home less each pay period if the funds never hit our accounts in the first place. But alas, that’s not the end of it.

We are expected to not only monitor the account’s progress by making sense of the monthly asset reports/charts/summaries/schedules/statements we receive, but to meet regularly with financial advisers, who speak in tongues, about our “goals.”

Eyes quickly gloss over as these cryptic advisers reference such concepts as P/E ratios, dollar-cost averaging, portfolio diversification, asset allocation and risk tolerance. The last such session I endured actually had me eager to return to the draft brief awaiting me on federal pre-emption of state usury laws.

“Yes, yes, I trust you, Jordan,” I cried over my shoulder as I hastily left the meeting, knowing it would serve me right if Jordan now filled my 401(k) with funds comprised of electric blanket startups in Western Sahara.

Golf. No article on frustration could leave out golf.

The lonely philosopher Charlie Brown, seated on his bench with sandwich in hand, said to himself, “Nothing takes the taste out of peanut butter quite like unrequited love.” The taste is equally missing from golf, a game I’ve tried to love, knowing it never loved me back.

Patrick Reed of Texas won the 2018 Masters Tournament, his first major title. The other 29 million golfers in the U.S. did not.

It’s a maddening game, and an ironic outlet for those fleeing professional exasperation.

Truly, the game’s consensus redeeming virtue, other than the 19th hole, is the knowledge that 29 million other duffers not named Patrick Reed regularly leave their rounds nearly as frustrated.

Lunch. It’s all too often “sandwiched” in between meetings, court appearances, conference calls and filing deadlines. Sandwich shops are ubiquitous in the Loop, making the easiest option hitting Potbelly, Pret, Specialty’s, Jersey Mike’s, Cosí or Au Bon Pain.

Yet, many today follow the “bread is dead” religion and seek to reroute the body’s natural GPS system away from a pastrami on rye and toward a newfangled salad at sweetgreen, Just Salads, Beatrix Market, Freshii or the venerable Mac Kelly’s Greens & Things.

Perhaps forcing down a spring mix with mango instead of an Italian beef serves some unspecified health interest, but when did sandwiches become an attorney's sworn enemy? Abraham Lincoln, Clarence Darrow, Thurgood Marshall, Perry Mason and Lt. Daniel Kaffee all denounced injustice and charging the wrong defendant, but did anyone ever hear them utter an unkind word about carbohydrates?

No matter, office lunch meetings find beleaguered, overworked and guilt-ridden lawyers sheepishly selecting a catered salad rather than the immensely more satisfying sub or panini offerings. Of course, when they think no one's looking on the way out, they snag a cookie or two.

While sandwiches and salads do not comprise the entire menu of lunch options, sitting down for a plate of fettuccine Alfredo or egg foo yung these days is nearly too decadent and time-consuming to consider. Besides, ordering Chinese food requires remembering to order it without MSG, and my mind is already racing ahead to this afternoon's deposition.

That's it! Back to the crossword: "NoMSG"

Networking. This is generally done every day while interacting with other lawyers, whether in court, at meetings, over cocktails or at lunch — when sharing a salad. Evenings and weekends can be filled with taking clients or prospects to dinners, ball games, golf courses or conferences.

We are told, however, that no matter how busy we are, these meager efforts are no longer enough.

We are to devise office seminars, expand our LinkedIn universe, schedule five new coffees with potential clients next week, become "thought leaders" on social media, polish our "elevator speeches" and get invited to that upcoming Stockholm conference to speak on "Legal Implications of the Scandinavian Midnight Sun."

And one more thing: Report back to the law firm's consultant when she returns early next month. Accountability now stands next to godliness. Cleanliness, arguably never a virtue to lawyers, was long ago supplanted.

Not another meeting with a marketing consultant. Isn't the 401(k) adviser available instead?

Feel free to e-mail me with the many frustrations I've omitted for use in a future column (where they'll almost surely be passed off as my own).

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