



CAALA President

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We are good at what we do

BUT ARE WE *GOOD ENOUGH*?

Every day we wake up and head off to work typically knowing what our day will be like. A court hearing, a depo, a client meeting, or just a day in the office catching up on the never-ending task list that directs our lives.

Effectively and efficiently strategizing and mapping out our cases – to either settle or to take to trial – is the skill set we seek to perfect on a daily basis. Fortunately, we have hundreds of fellow trial lawyers who have committed to help their trial-lawyer brothers and sisters in that quest for perfection. And fortunately, we have CAALA – which has provided unparalleled educational and networking programs to our members for decades.

But there is one aspect of a trial lawyer's life that we often forget to "work on" – and that is our loved ones. The challenging nature of what we do, who we represent and the impact we have on the lives of our clients is – I would venture to state – probably more stressful than in most other professions. Add to that, the financial risks we assume – and most people pass on a professional life so risky and so demanding.

But not trial lawyers – we are a special and unique breed. Our risk tolerance is way above average and our willingness to work for free until such time as we convince someone of the strength and value of our case – or prove these things to a trier of fact – is not for the average professional.

We are so engaged in what we do, we oftentimes forget where we came from, how we got here and who helped us get here. We get so tied up in case acquisition, litigation, overhead costs and winning – we tend to forget who is helping us get those wins. Sure, we appreciate our staff and associates and partners. We make sure they're happy because we know their happiness helps us achieve our professional goals and we all know without good help in the office we wouldn't be able to take on all those cases we must have in our pipelines to help cover

all that overhead and case costs – and live that life we all dream of as successful trial lawyers.

But ask yourself one question: Do I appreciate that loved one as importantly as that awesome paralegal or outstanding associate that I could not practice so successfully without?

The national divorce rate is 50 percent. The divorce rate in California is above the national average. Although a divorce veteran myself, I do not claim to be an expert on the cause of most divorces. However, I do consider myself an authority on the effect of divorce. Having lived through it, having so many trial lawyer friends who have been through it and understanding my own failures and mistakes, I will say this: Our professional lives as trial lawyers IS *NOT* easy on our loved ones.

The pain and anguish I brought upon my children and my ex-wife almost 15 years ago was the worst time in my life. I wish that devastation on no one – and I do what I can to relay those painful days to every lawyer I mentor or can help.

I am not saying that every married trial lawyer will have a successful marriage if he or she simply appreciates their loved ones as much as they do those they work with. What I am suggesting is that you stop and take a few moments out of your stressful and busy days to acknowledge that person you wake up next to every morning. That person who is always there supporting you and encouraging you. That person who takes care of your home and in some cases your children – sometimes when they have their own job or pressures that we many times are too busy to see. While I will agree that many marriages end for the right reasons, I believe that many trial lawyer marriages end because of a lack of appreciation of the commitment and support our loved ones provide.

I have learned that the simple act of saying "thank you" when you come home late after a long day – and find a dinner plate on the table and a pot full of your

favorite food on the stove – goes a long way. Or after a week of depositions and long nights in the office – calling that loved one and telling them to pack a bag as you are taking her or him away to Santa Barbara for the weekend – is not rocket science and works wonders to show just how important they are to you.

And let's not forget the other loved ones subjected to our trial lawyer lifestyle – our children. There are so many late nights and working weekends we must commit to – or we know we will not be adequately prepared for that filing or that hearing or that depo or that trial – and we must make these commitments to properly represent our clients. But, all these commitments can and must be tempered with the time and commitment your children also need. Movies are made and stories are written about the lives of many successful people who wished in their glory days that they had a better relationship with their children. Unfortunately, most of those stories don't end positively.

Children are like plants – a little watering every day and they will thrive. Some weeding here and there and they will grow strong and beautiful. A failure to water or feed the plant can cause significant damage. And, while many plants are resilient – as are our children – a continued failure to water and weed can lead to long-term problems.

So, take that Friday night off – turn off the ringer on your phone – and take your kids to the movies – a movie they want to see – with the parent they don't get to see as much as they want to. Take them on that hike or to the beach on a day when they want to go – not on the day that you can take them. Show them they are as important to you as that client who you always find time for because his case is worth millions. Do the simple things that make your kids happy. It's not that hard to do – it just takes an appreciation of who they are and what they mean to you – today and later in your life.