



Does a tree that falls in the forest make any sound?

PUBLICIZE YOUR GOOD DEEDS WITH CHARITIES SUCH AS OCTLC

My girlfriend has never dated an attorney before. Nor has she ever really known any. All she hears about are my attorney war stories, and she accompanies me to lots of attorney events.

But she said something to me the other day. She said, and I quote: “Your attorney friends are so *interesting*. I always thought lawyers would be stuffy and boring.”

Let that sink in. Stuffy and boring? Us? I know, some of her perceptions were probably well deserved, but that would be defense attorneys, right? Stuffy, boring, hate their jobs, soul-less . . . I can go on and on. What’s the difference between a good defense lawyer and a bad defense lawyer? A bad defense lawyer might let a case drag on for several years. A good defense lawyer knows how to make it last even longer.

But we plaintiff attorneys are different in some very important ways. We are an interesting lot. For the most part, we are all well-educated, intelligent, and hard working. We have interesting jobs and deal with interesting facts, cases and clients. We are dedicated to our clients. Most importantly, we wear the white hat. We protect the public, consumers and individuals, from the powerful, evil forces out there. We sleep well at night, and actually care about our clients. What in-house defense attorney really cares about the insurance company paying their low rates? Sounds miserable to me.

There are so many misperceptions about attorneys. My friend Bob Simon always says, “Don’t act like an attorney! Be yourself.” That sort of assumes that any of us know who we really are, or how others perceive us. “*Temet Nosce*” means know thyself. In my prior life I was an actor. Actors are always taught not to act. Actors are taught to be real. The same goes for trial attorneys. Don’t act! Find yourself, discover who you are,

and be real with the jury and the public.

If we truly believe that we are the good guys and are fighting the good fight, then how do we change the public’s perception of trial attorneys? Are we “just in it for the money” (think about the perception of greedy trial lawyers), or do we really care about our clients?

The reality is simple: Most people don’t like attorneys. This simple fact should inform all of your other marketing and public relation efforts. The good news is that, once someone knows they need a lawyer, their opinions change. One study found that only 15% of people with a bona fide legal issue have a negative view of attorneys.

Attorneys need to acknowledge popular misconceptions about ourselves and be able to candidly address the concerns of the public – and our jury pool. We can use popular stereotypes as an opportunity to change public opinion volunteering and being generous through charity. Don’t ignore the marketing aspect of this; be certain to publish your efforts through blog posts, social media, and other avenues.

Orange County Trial Lawyers Charity

In my prior column, I highlighted our charity this year – Kim Valentine’s Operation Helping Hands. Every year we pick one charity and donate all the proceeds from our annual Top Gun Event to that charity. This year we are also partnering with the Orange County Trial Lawyers Charity (OCTLC) to expand our reach into the charitable communities. The similarities in the names have caused quite a bit of confusion. Let me clarify – OCTLA and OCTLC are two different organizations. My good friend Michelle West founded and leads OCTLC, and she is a good member of OCTLA. Past presidents and current board members of OCTLA sit on the board of OCTLC.

The difference between OCTLA and OCTLC is simple. OCTLA’s Mission Statement and goal is: “To protect the rights of people who have been harmed by the wrongful acts of others, by providing superior education and training for attorneys; access to the collective resources, knowledge, and experience of our members; and promotion and support of laws which correct injustice and protect access to the civil justice system.” We select one charity each year to which we donate the Top Gun Event proceeds.

OCTLC, on the other hand, concentrates all its efforts on charities. OCTLC was founded to make a positive difference in the quality of life for people within the greater Orange County area, focusing on education, children, survivors of abuse, persons with disabilities, and homelessness. OCTLC provides financial assistance and volunteer services to nonprofits making a difference in the Orange County community.

With so much crossover and mutual participation from attorneys in both organizations, it was inevitable that we would explore some sort of partnership between the two organizations. We support each other’s events, participate in beach clean-ups, building Habitat for Humanity projects, outreach to the Orange County legal community, volunteering on mock trial boards for high school students, and other ways to not only help our community, but also to change the public perception of trial attorneys.

There are a bounty of ways to change the public’s view of attorneys, but giving back to the community both monetarily and with volunteerism is a great first step. But don’t forget to publicize those efforts. Does a tree that falls in the forest make any sound?

