

Tapping into What Matters

By Anthony J. Murgatroyd, Esq.

We often find ourselves judging our success by our profit and loss statements.

As lawyers who handle personal injury cases, we can easily lose sight of who we represent and why our representation is so important to them. Our clients are people who have been physically, emotionally, and financially injured by the negligence of a corporation or another individual.

They are people who are usually outmatched financially by the companies and individuals who have wronged them. They are people with few resources to solve the problem on their own. As their lawyers, we have a very special and unique opportunity to help them. When they have nowhere else to turn, they come to us.

An individual who is severely injured has little redress outside the civil justice system. Complaints do little to change corporate policies and procedures; nor will they compensate for people's injury and financial harm. But companies and individuals do take notice when they are forced to meet our clients in court. Our courts provide the only venue where individuals can stand on equal footing with the corporations and individuals who caused their harm.

When clients hire us to represent them, we must always try to remember that our gains come at the expense of their losses. Our clients, in many cases, have suffered serious, debilitating and life threatening injuries -- even death. Who among us would want to trade places with our clients and accept the settlement, in exchange for enduring lifelong debilitating injury?

During the past holiday season it dawned on me that my success comes at the expense of the client's misfortunes. I headed out of the office, bought a card and some gifts and traveled over to a rehab center to spend the rest of the day with my most seriously injured client.

He was rendered a quadriplegic by a motor vehicle accident. I went in casual clothes. I dropped the lawyer role. We talked for hours. I got to know him as a person. I even fed him his lunch. I left feeling like a new person. I felt like he did more for me than I did for him.

I share this with you because we personal injury lawyers represent people with serious injuries. And we can lose sight of why we do this for a living.

We may exhibit skepticism about the seriousness of their injuries and their motives. Or we may get caught up in worrying about our own profits. We criticize defendants for "putting profits above people," yet we measure our success by the size of our settlements and verdicts.

In doing this, we can forget that, generally, the bigger the financial award, the more suffering a person has endured.

Often we don't take the time to see the bigger picture -- that is to provide compassion and dedication to fellow human beings who need and deserve compensation. People who have put their trust in us.

I encourage everybody to visit one seriously injured client whenever you are feeling detached and profit driven.

Not only will you learn a lot more about your case, you will feel renewed. You will remember why you have chosen to represent people who are injured by the negligence of others.

You will remember that in some small way, you are working to make the world a safer place and giving help to people who deserve it.

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The blood drive is by appointment only.

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