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Carrying forward lessons learned in 2014 to make 2015 even better

The holidays were a time for us to reflect on all that has transpired over the past 12 months and to consider our goals and aspirations for the coming year. What we experience — both the successes and the disappointments — leave an indelible mark and teach us invaluable lessons that carry us forward.

Like everyone, I have been the beneficiary of many wonderful blessings, including family, friends and career, and I have also experienced significant losses which have forever shaped who I am today.

As I look back on 2014, I have developed a list of lessons learned — or revisited — and hope that it will be a helpful road map on our 2015 journeys.

- Follow your passion.

It is essential that we commit at least part of each day to doing those things that we love. They will bring us joy and a sense of balance against those aspects of our lives we may not enjoy as much. We need to have hobbies and outside interests and should also strive for careers which bring us satisfaction and fulfillment.

- Live outside your comfort zone.

This has been my personal mantra over the past several years — and 2014 in particular. Success is acknowledging our strengths and fully leveraging them while also pushing ourselves beyond our existing boundaries into new terrain.

Exactly how we should strike that balance is a personal decision and is driven by what we want to achieve as well as our hopes and aspirations.

- Recognize and embrace new

opportunities. As I reflect on the major turning points in my life, a few consistent themes emerge.

One is the understanding that opportunity comes along more often when we are open to it. The second is that the magnitude of change precipitated by certain opportunities is not always readily apparent at the time we are making the decision whether or not to embrace it.

Indeed, opportunities often come disguised as impositions on our time or just more on our list of things to do. It is important to impart a mindfulness to all that we do and the choices we make so that we can make sound decisions when opportunities do present themselves.

- Focus on what matters.

We all have countless responsibilities and pressures in our lives, and it is easy to focus on those things which are vying most for our attention rather than on what matters most to us.

Too often, we get sidetracked by projects, goals and agendas which in the grand scheme don't matter and are a waste of our time and energy. It is essential to separate the wheat from the chaff, to gain clarity about our priorities and to govern ourselves accordingly.

- Maintain your focus.

Keeping our focus is essential in a 24-7 world full of non-stop stimuli, and it is easy for all of this noise to distract us in a way that makes us much less effective.

In order to optimally perform, we must find a way to effectively juggle it all while at the same time maintain our ability to focus on the task at hand and give it our full attention and consideration as if it is the most important thing in

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our lives at that moment.

- Have a positive attitude.

Let's face it — no one likes to hang out with a Debbie Downer, least of all our clients. We can always do a better job of keeping our negativity to a minimum, especially when we are with others.

Positivity begets positivity, and if we encounter certain people or circumstances which are likely to elicit negative responses from us or vice versa, it is our responsibility to address these individuals and situations as constructively as possible.

- Think outside the box. This is particularly important since lawyers are expected to provide thoughtful, creative solutions on a regular basis. We need to figure out how we can regularly free our minds and access that "zone"

within ourselves which enables us to think strategically and innovatively.

This is essential in unlocking our ability to perform at our full potential.

- Dare to be different.

Painting outside the lines can be a good thing, especially when we live in a profession where our success greatly depends on our ability to meaningfully differentiate ourselves. We should think about how best to take our existing skill set and transform it into something unique and original that effectively speaks to those around us — whatever that may look like.

- Be authentic.

How often do we encounter people who are inauthentic? We can often feel surrounded, and just like specious behavior is obvious to us, others can likewise sense when we are not being forthcoming about our true intentions or motivations. It is incumbent upon us all to lead by example and to bring our most authentic selves to our professional and personal lives.

- Give back.

Giving can take countless forms and should be done in ways that speak to us and which make the most meaningful difference to others.

Whether it is performing pro bono work, mentoring young attorneys we know or helping a student with a law school application, we should look for ways to pay forward the wonderful gifts which have been bestowed upon us during the course of our lives.

I hope that this list of New Year's goals helps as you prioritize your own aspirations for the next 12 months.