

BACK-TO-SCHOOL

There – did you hear it?? About 60% of grade school parents and almost 80% of high school parents are screaming – yay! The kids finally went back to school! There’s this collective sigh of FINALLY! Truth is this time of year always has a feeling of melancholy to me as we, like many of you, really enjoy having our kids around, and we certainly miss having them around during the summers now that they’re all grown and out of the house. I miss those days, as chaotic as they were.

The joy, I understand it, but I don’t get it. You see when I was growing up I was one of those super goal oriented students that couldn’t wait to get back to school because each year and each subject and each class brought me closer to finishing this long and arduous journey to being ‘done with school’ ... FINALLY!

And then it happened, I met an inconspicuous professor who asked me to stay after class one day. I thought that I forgot an assignment or messed up something on a blue book test. And then it happened, completely out of left field, my life changed. Dr. Conrad Gates, professor of Labor Law, an arbitrator, an expert employment attorney, one of the wisest and most worldly gentlemen (in its truest sense) took a moment to say to me – Baker (I’m not sure he knew my first name) – ‘what are you going to do when you graduate?’ Truth is I was chasing two options, actually three. One was get a job in HR (I was already serving an internship); one was to become a licensed psychologist; the third one was getting married to my long-time girlfriend who eventually did say yes! I said, I’m thinking about graduate school, I’ve been accepted and I think that is the route I’m going. His response was short and to the point – ‘you’ve got a gift Baker – you should either go into HR or go to law school and become an employment attorney.’ WHAT JUST HAPPENED? This was one of the smartest and most respected professors I’ve ever had the opportunity to take. Why did he care to take a moment and pull me aside and give me one sentence of career advice. I remember being so taken back and yet honored that he would say such a thing. That comment stuck in my head for months afterwards and eventually I did make the decision to chase this profession.

The truth is all of that training up through finishing college taught me one thing. Life is about continuous learning. If you stop when you graduate your knowledge stops there too. College created a level of personal curiosity that has provided me the tools to do the things we do today. It has paid off well. That said, would you want to go to a doctor whose most recent learning occurred 20 years ago? Not me. Here’s a prime example...

About 7 years ago I had to have a fairly serious heart procedure done. It is important to know that I don’t like nor take medications as I’m the rock head that thinks it best to tough it out. I didn’t know how serious it was, but I’m glad to say it all worked out really, really well. However, the evening of the procedure I had an incident that exposed the underbelly of learning. You see - I coded. You want to see a calm step down unit jump to action – pass out in your hospital bed after a heart procedure and try to pay attention to what happens next. The truth is I had about 15 members of my family visiting me in my room, but all the while the incision where they did the procedure was causing more and more pain, excruciating pain, up to the point where I couldn’t tolerate it any longer and then the worst thing that could happen did - I passed out. The monitors go nuts due to dropped blood pressure and slower pulse, I’m half out of consciousness but aware enough to hear what’s going on. My family is rushed from the room and 10 cardiologist residents rush into the room and are standing at the bottom of my bed arguing about what it supposed to happen next, with one commanding that I be rushed down to the operating room and they start by-pass surgery immediately! Since I was only out for a few seconds, I’m fully awake now watching this debacle of a debate happening in front of me. All of my vitals have normalized, I’m fine. I’m not sure all of these residents know I’m in the room. Meanwhile the surgical resident who can’t wait to split me open is commanding that his way is right! One not to tolerate senselessness for too long a period of time, I scream at the top of my lungs – STOP! The room stops. I state rather emphatically – LISTEN – THE PAIN FROM MY INCISION IS KILLING ME – THAT’S WHY I PASSED OUT. The nurse who was taking care of me immediately shuffles everyone out of the room and gives me a strong dose of ibuprofen to relieve the pain. My wife, a pharmacist, is terrified watching this fiasco unwind in front of her. She assumes the worst I’m sure. Moments later my family members all sheepishly wave goodbye to me from the door and head home. Literally seconds later my PCP, Dr. Peter, stops in making his rounds. It’s 9:30 at night. He’s already put in a 14 hour day. Now this guy is a genius, very honest, but unbelievably smart and highly respected everywhere. He says – I guess we had some excitement here! I said sorry Doc, but what was that all about. His next comment was spot on – “kids today, referencing the residents, they

get out of med school and think they know everything. I've treated thousands upon thousands of patients and I'm surprised everyday about what the human body does. I haven't even scratched the surface! Did any one of those 'doctors' ask you anything?" Unfortunately they didn't, but one very smart nurse and one very brilliant doctor who committed their lives to learning did!

So it's back to school. Watch for munchkins around school buses, encourage someone who might not expect it – you might very well change their life, help someone who can't pay you back, take a moment to learn something new, and respect the person with the most experience in the room – those doctors certainly did – Thank the Lord!!!

I wish you well,

Dave