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The Road Less Traveled

Skills and Professional Development



“We act as though comfort and luxury were the chief requirements of life, when all that we need to make us really happy is something to be enthusiastic about.”

~ Charles Kingsley

When was the last time you were really enthusiastic about something? I don't mean just motivated, but truly excited. As we accumulate life experience, enthusiasm and excitement become rare commodities. In childhood, discoveries occur daily, if not hourly, and the anticipation of special days like Christmas and birthdays have us vibrating with excitement. I recall attending the birthday party for a friend's one-year-old daughter many years ago. The parents had not yet introduced her to cake or ice cream. After we sang "Happy Birthday," a cupcake was placed in front of the little girl. She grabbed a fistful of cake and promptly shoved it in her mouth. As soon as her taste buds and brain registered that first bite of sugar, her eyes flew wide open as if to say: "What is THIS amazing thing!" Her hands rapidly began working to consume as much of the cupcake as fast as possible. It was a delightful scene to watch and a reminder of how wonderfully energizing a new discovery could be.

Moments like those are so few and far between as adults. As we get older, we don't even want to be reminded of birthdays. Many of us hope they will slip by without notice or acknowledgment. These days, our struggle in the hectic pace of our daily lives as legal professionals is to find time to relax, to slow down, to practice "mindfulness" (that latest buzzword of personal development). We think: "I

just need a break — just one day, one hour when no one is demanding something of me. Can I just have a few moments when there isn't a deadline to meet, a meeting to attend, an email to answer or even a vacation to plan?" Forget about excitement or enthusiasm. The need for excitement doesn't even enter the picture. We get plenty of excitement at work. Right? Wrong. That constant hum of activity at work isn't excitement; that's anxiety, stress, and the constant strain of unending obligations. Now there may be a lucky few whose jobs suit them perfectly and most days are a welcome rush of discovery and adrenaline. But by and large, I would guess that many of us are still trying to navigate the peaks and valleys of everyday tasks.

Over time, the new and fascinating transform into old and boring. A benefit of gaining experience is wisdom. The downside of experience is lack of surprise and even, perhaps, disdain for the everyday. I think of Tom Hanks in the movie *Castaway* in which he has been rescued and is waiting to meet the fiancée he left behind when his plane crashed. A feast of seafood covers the table, which most people would view as a luxurious spread. Having survived on the same type of seafood for years on a desert island, his face registers more than a hint of irony and disgust. That which becomes commonplace in our lives can eventually evoke contempt.

So how do we overcome this onset of boredom, this lack of enthusiasm? How do we change our rut into a groove? I think the answer is to change our life's soundtrack. We can do that by trying something new. This may seem elementary but that makes it no less true. I tried something completely new a couple of weeks ago and it reenergized me in a way no amount of sleep could. In the words of Inigo Montoya from the movie [The Princess Bride](#), "Let me explain...."

In 2015, the ACC Annual Meeting keynote speaker was Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist, whose [TED Talk](#) on [body language](#) was one of the most viewed online talks of all time. And that was my first introduction to TED Talks. (Disclosure to readers: Yes, I am aware that I tend to be a bit behind the times when new things hit the street. For example, I didn't know about *Downton Abbey* until season three was airing. But...I digress.)

After that 2015 Annual Meeting, I began to watch TED Talks regularly and this expanded my knowledge and viewpoint on a variety of subjects and people. One of my goals is to take out a loan and attend in person the primary TED conference.

Fast forward to a quiet Saturday morning in March 2018. Reading our local paper, I learned that there was going to be a [TEDx event](#) in our area that day. I quickly ate breakfast, changed clothes, and headed to the event. The agenda listed a day of talks intermingled with musical performances by high school juniors and seniors with some impressive bios. Given the reputation of TED Talks, I anticipated a day of thought-provoking mind-expanding discourse. I was not disappointed. In fact, listening to these talented, intelligent young adults perform with such startling professionalism and orate with wisdom far beyond their years both excited and energized me. My hope in the coming generations soared. I made a point to stay and meet with some of the speakers and their parents. The passion and preparation that each one of them brought to the stage reminded me that I needed to do "this" more — "this" being to wander off the daily trail of life more often. Rest and relaxation may give us an opportunity to recharge, but the discovery and exploration of new people and experiences rejuvenates the feelings of excitement and enthusiasm. To paraphrase the words of [Robert Frost](#), I encourage you to "take the road less traveled by; it will make all the difference."

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