
ACC DOCKET

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Gratitude Doesn't Cause Drowsiness

Skills and Professional Development



This was going to be a column about discretion and judgment, and my perception that we need to reinvigorate those skills in the modern workplace, but that topic has thus far defied my attempts to wrestle it into the confines of this page. Ruminating on this in the shower yesterday, right as I was reflecting happily on the fact that it was (for me, at least) New Soap Day (those of you who still use soap in bar form know what I'm talking about) — I recalled that this column appears in the November issue, so perhaps I should let the discretion topic gestate a little longer and pause to reflect on what I'm grateful for.

Perhaps it wasn't as much of a "eureka" moment as I'd prefer to remember it. I've read a lot lately about the benefits of practicing gratitude to one's health and outlook; it's captured my attention despite the fact that I don't see myself as a particularly touchy-feely sort. A recent article alerted me to a book called *The Upward Spiral*, in which author and neuroscientist Alex Korb posits that gratitude can have an antidepressant effect "because feeling grateful activates the brain stem region that produces dopamine." So, perhaps it's time we retire the "tryptophan in turkey" myth that circulates each Thanksgiving, and instead celebrate the dopamine in gratitude.

As the general counsel of a law department of one, I'm grateful for my client company. Like many of you, I started my legal career in private practice, and back then I didn't always have the final (or sometimes any) say on who my clients would be. I don't take for granted the fact that I have only one client, that we chose each other freely, and that I support, respect and believe in my client's mission. As much as I enjoy being a lawyer, and associating with lawyers, I'm also grateful that most of my days are spent working with businesspeople, and that this gives me the opportunity to demonstrate that working with lawyers can be a positive and enjoyable experience. Also, as a small law practitioner, I'm grateful for the diverse and often unpredictable nature of the subjects I'm called to tackle; I feel fortunate that after almost 10 years as GC, I've yet to hit the horizontal part of the

learning curve.

I'm particularly grateful for ACC. I joined in 2004 as my duties increasingly focused on the general corporate needs of my employer; I was originally hired to advise investigative teams on healthcare fraud issues. We all remember, and sometimes still experience, the questions coming from friends and family right after graduation from law school about any and all legal topics. The situation was much the same in the workplace in the early days — as the attorney on the team, I was sought for the legal perspective on many topics I'd never considered before. At work, however, I couldn't reply with "I don't practice probate law, and I'm not licensed in your jurisdiction anyway, so I can't really advise you on whether those five handwritten pages on hotel notepad witnessed by nearby barista and then stuffed in your glovebox is adequate for your testamentary wishes." I could say "I don't know, but I'll find out right away," and that's where ACC's online resources and eGroups really helped me be more responsive and effective.

I'm also very grateful for the relationships I've formed via ACC in the meantime. I attended my first Annual Meeting in 2005 in Washington, DC, and I still count as friends to this day many people I met back then. Those relationships, in turn, prompted me to get more involved in the organization, at both the committee and chapter levels. I'm particularly grateful for the guidance and friendship of former classmate and current ACC General Counsel Jim Merklinger, who insisted at that 2005 Annual Meeting that I sign up for the Small Law Department Committee right then and there, and who later visited South Carolina to meet with ACC members, and inspire several of us at that meeting to work together to form a chapter. Most recently, I was grateful, honored and humbled to have been invited to serve on ACC's board of directors.

Finally, I'm very thankful for my editors at the *Docket*, who give me broad latitude in my choice of column topics, and who also usually cut me some slack on my preference for the Oxford comma. I hope you all have as much to be grateful for as I do!

Correction: The October "Small Law" column was incorrectly attributed to Mr. Wheeler. The author of "Find Someone to Carry" was Maryrose Delahunty, VP & GC, Invocon Inc.

[Jeffrey W. Wheeler](#)



Associate General Counsel

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