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# **ACC DOCKET**

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**Opportunities for Improvement**

**Skills and Professional Development**



There's a saying that goes: "In this world, you're either growing or you're dying, so get in motion and grow." Are you growing in your personal and professional life? It is difficult, if not outright impossible, to be in today's world, where technology and access to knowledge are as readily available as ever, and not find a chance for daily optimization.

The first law of motion essentially states that a body in motion stays in motion unless acted upon by an outside force. The same is true of a body at rest. Every day we are bombarded with chances to make improvements — but it can be difficult to recognize them.

The outside forces are pervasive and will cause you to bump into opportunities no matter where you go. But if you are on a wifi-less deserted island or in a cave, it is possible to just sit like a bump on a log and stay stagnant.

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For the average person, however, let alone the above average person, not only are the opportunities there, we have a strong societal desire to improve our lives or parts of our lives. We want improved conditions for our health, finances, relationships both romantic and platonic, jobs, and more.

We have at our disposal technology that makes it possible to have access to just about all knowledge from recorded history at our disposal with the flick of a finger. While we are working out, we can listen to podcasts about ancient Rome. Or, just as easily, we can decide not to workout and scroll through Twitter. This information is on our computers, in our phones, and therefore, at our fingertips. We no longer need to visit the town square or the local library to hear or read the words of great philosophers and thinkers of past generations. But the temptation to watch mindless entertainment also abounds.

There are stories daily of people doing tremendous acts of kindness and bravery that provide examples of what we can be, as well as people living the most vile and evil lives imaginable that show us what we can become if we choose instead to take the road to depravity. The bottom line is that the opportunities are there, and we have the choice of what to do with what's available.

But as we've acknowledged, it can become routine to find ourselves lazy or unobservant, which allows us to stay in our bubbles of nonmovement. It's probably rare that anyone sets out to specifically be lazy. More than likely, it's when we find ourselves worn out and overwhelmed that we desire a moment of reprieve, a short respite. We take a day and that becomes two, then three, which feels so good it stretches into a week. The next thing you know, it's been months since you've worked on your personal project. The idea is to get back to it, but once we start down that path it becomes easy to disengage.

What if we started each day with the intent of being a better person? What if every morning we looked for opportunities to grow and improve?

I have that opportunity. I am connected to people who are making a difference in the world, and because of social media, my connections are no longer limited by geography. I love that I have the ability to be a part of a growing community of game changers.

It is requiring me to step up my own game, learn new skills, and stretch outside my comfort zone. Every day is something new, and I get to share that with interesting people. I have the chance to learn from them and to teach them as well. There is nothing like teaching that pushes you to dig into what you know to gain clarity of purpose and intention.

I am growing in the use of technology, relationships, and even the way I learn and grow. I can improve because I want to — and I know I need to. I cannot keep up with the pace of information transfer if I am not involved in the process. And because I put myself amid the evolution, I too am constantly evolving.

Like many of you, I wanted to be the best at lots of things. Sadly, I wasn't willing to do what it took to get there. Many things came easily for me, so it was a wish, rather than a goal, and I allowed good to be good enough. That approach stunted my ability to fully develop and reach my full potential, because when the going got tough — I bailed. At some point, I had to pick up and start all over again, but with a work ethic that was mediocre at best, I recognize I missed out on some of what I wanted.

Fortunately, I didn't compound that by playing the victim. My choices and lack of concerted effort landed me where it did. A turning point was when I lost first chair in band. I took my position for

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granted and rarely practiced. I am grateful for that lesson and have continued putting it into practice throughout my legal career by constantly seeking ways in which I can get better while working toward my goals. A great example of that is when I joined the Association of Corporate Counsel and employed the use of a Mastermind group the first time I was appointed legal counsel. I could have tried to figure out how to be counsel on my own, by trial and error, but I knew learning the job and when and where to leverage my resources would lead me to success.

The same is true for you. You can make improvements in the things you want to do. And if you are on the lookout for those opportunities, you won't find yourself sitting stagnant in a cave.

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**Whitnie Wiley** was a long-time columnist for the *ACC Docket*, where she wrote the Lead the Way column for more than seven years. The column provided leadership tips for in-house counsel and others as they pursue their personal and professional goals.