

# Grace Under Pressure

By Tish Vincent

**W**e left the Norwegian village of Balestrand on a sunny morning in June 2003 following an adventurous route drawn for us by the hotel clerk rather than the one provided by the travel agent. We drove in a northeasterly direction into the mountains. I was driving with my adult son and husband as passengers. They were relaxed, taking photographs and admiring the scenery.

Only I was aware that the road was becoming increasingly icy as we climbed thousands of feet into the mountains. The narrow road had no guardrail and the slope of the mountain fell away from the side of the road. Though it was imperceptible to my passengers, the slippery surface filled me with dread.

There was no margin of error and no guardrail to block our descent. The hotel clerk told us the drive would be pleasant because there wouldn't be much traffic. If we skidded off the road and down the mountainside, who knew when another motorist might discover us? I was frightened and unsure of what to do. As the driver, I felt responsible for my passengers' safety.

Rounding a curve, I spotted a rest area. I inched the car into the parking lot and told my family I wanted to sit and take in the scenery without driving. We stayed there for 45 minutes as the sun rose higher in the sky and melted the ice. Soon we were on our way again on pavement that was no longer icy.

## Grace

How do individuals in leadership positions effectively manage challenging or frightening times, inspire the confidence of their followers, and care for themselves?



Searching for sources of information on this topic, I happened upon an article in *Forbes* titled "7 Ways Leaders Maintain Their Composure in Difficult Times" by Glenn Llopis.<sup>1</sup> His seven recommendations were:

- Don't allow your emotions to get in the way.
- Don't take things personally.
- Keep a positive mental attitude.
- Remain fearless.
- Respond decisively.
- Take accountability.
- Act like you have been there before.

## Pressure

The practice of law puts much pressure on the lives of attorneys and judges. The profession places us in positions of leadership every day. How do we handle that

pressure? Do we talk about it with others and seek support, or do we give an impression of fearlessness when we actually need to connect?

Law is a competitive profession. Competitive people can view collaboration in a negative light. Yet maintaining a positive mental attitude depends on collaborating with at least a few others who can offer guidance and support.

Lawyers are quite skilled at setting aside their emotions. We tend not to take things personally. We are busy practicing law and plotting strategies. Keeping a positive mental attitude can be taxing. Appearing to remain fearless is a strong skill, but many attorneys seeking counseling admit to experiencing intense fears about their incomes, their skill sets, and whether they are good at what they do.

Responding decisively feels reassuring when we know the law and what it controls. Other times, we communicate our knowledge of the ambiguities and uncertainties inherent in the outcome of a negotiation, mediation, or trial.

Taking accountability can be challenging. When things go awry, most attorneys can "lawyer" a solution by arguing, advocating, and negotiating. But when they struggle with an emotional illness, an addiction, or a mistake, lawyering can interfere with accountability.

Conveying a confident, competent demeanor to those following you is wise.

Acting like you've been there before describes moving forward with confidence. Conveying a confident, competent demeanor to those following you is wise. If attorneys know that their confidence exceeds their competence, then performing due diligence to get up to speed or calling an expert for advice is a way to maintain composure and observe the professional responsibility to be competent in handling client matters.

## 2014

This year has brought many pressures to the State Bar of Michigan. Graceful leaders have kept us on course, offering service to Michigan attorneys and citizens. This column honors their leadership and dedication.

## Back to Norway

At our lunch in Norway that slippery day in June, I told my husband and son about the conditions we faced driving in the mountains. They both expressed relief—glad we traveled safely, glad I found a solution, glad the driving conditions improved, and glad I never told them how bad it was at the time. ■



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## ENDNOTE

1. Ilopis, *7 Ways Leaders Maintain Their Composure in Difficult Times*, Forbes, January 20, 2014, available at <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/glennilopis/2014/01/20/7-ways-leaders-maintain-their-composure-in-difficult-times/>> (accessed September 15, 2014).

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