

From the Desk of the Chairperson

By Diane L. Akers



When I was a first year associate, my firm's managing partner, the late Richard D. Rohr, took me to lunch to welcome me to the firm. Over the years, many people have given me advice about practicing law, and I have appreciated and benefited from the generosity of numerous colleagues.

But the insight I gained from Dick Rohr at that lunch impressed me more than almost anything else I learned from those friends and mentors.

I recall so clearly, with all of Dick Rohr's professional achievements, he told me that what was most important to him was that, each morning when he woke up and thought about his day, he considered at least part of what he was going to do to be fun. He acknowledged that not everything a lawyer does is fun and that there were events in his day that he didn't necessarily enjoy. But he did his best to ensure that every day of his life as a lawyer involved things that gave him pleasure, and he wanted me to approach my life as a lawyer the same way.

To be sure, Dick Rohr was a model of hard work, commitment, and integrity and his contributions to the legal profession are legion. His passing in 2008 was a great loss to the business and legal communities. But for me, to have achieved all that he did while having fun, for such a long time, is one of his most remarkable achievements.

Over the years, I have kept this advice in mind. Sometimes, it has been a challenge to find things in my day that I considered to be fun. After all, I'm a commercial litigator. How can reviewing mountains of documents, answering interrogatories, or deposing an actuary be fun? But each time I'm tempted to focus on the nature of the task I'm about to do, I remind myself that Dick Rohr was able to find a way to take pleasure in tasks that he must have performed innumerable times. So, the secret in enjoying the work you do can't be in the nature of the work itself.

Today, I don't hear very many people talk about having fun practicing law. Law firms and corporate law departments are cutting lawyers. Clients are going out of business or, if they stay in business, they no longer have the money to hire lawyers to do the work they used to pay their lawyers to do. Therefore, even those lawyers who still have jobs and still have clients don't have the same amount of work from those clients. It's tough to think about a luxury like having fun if you're struggling just to keep your law practice alive.

It can also be easy to buy into some of the negative messages about lawyers that seem to permeate the media and society as a whole. If we accept the unflattering but popular image of lawyers, then how could we find pleasure in the nefarious deeds we're accused of com-

mitting as a matter of course by the cynical public (unless, of course, we truly do belong in the book *Lawyers and Other Reptiles*)?

The State Bar of Michigan's "A Lawyer Helps" initiative perhaps provides one avenue to avoid some of these negative influences. Although it may be aimed primarily at educating the public about pro bono and service activities, it also highlights a theme that can help all of us enjoy what we do every day as well. We help our clients solve their business problems and advance their business objectives. While that might seem obvious, it can get lost in the day-to-day grind of daily practice.

Although he didn't say it, I believe that giving advice to new lawyers was something Dick Rohr thought was fun. And I think he knew he had found something in his practice that was uncommon and was well worth sharing—something he wanted to pass on to me and hoped I would pass on to others.

You, too, know something about practicing law that is uncommon and well worth sharing, whatever that may be. Passing your advice on to newer lawyers may be something you find to be fun.

I have told the story of my lunch with Dick Rohr to many people over the years, and always have fun telling it. From the reactions I get, it seems that too few of us wake up each morning with the outlook Dick Rohr described to me.

As the practice of law changes and as we change, I think we need to build in and preserve aspects of our professional lives that each of us considers to be fun, whatever that may mean for each of us. Perhaps it involves adding different activities to our work lives, and perhaps it involves rethinking how we view existing activities. Whatever it takes, the result will be well worth the effort.