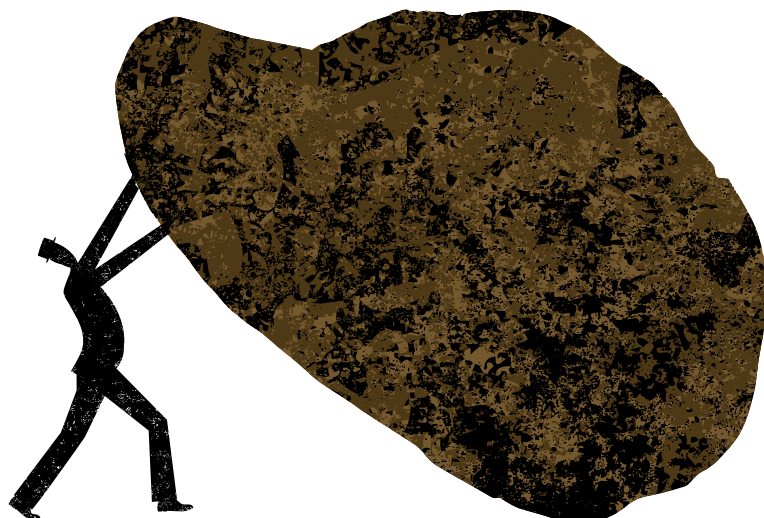


No Stone Left Unturned

By Lynn Patrick Ingram



“So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.” (1 Samuel 17:50)

Most of us recognize this familiar scene as the climax of the story of David and Goliath. In this scene, David, appearing to be a heavy underdog in a fight with the physically imposing Goliath, defeats the powerful giant by thinking outside the box and acting quickly and decisively.

It's also the story that motivated new State Bar of Michigan President Robert (Rob) Buchanan to dedicate the last 25 years of his legal career to seeking justice for the proverbial little guy.

“I enjoy being their metaphoric David figure in single combat against powerful and moneyed Goliaths,” he says on his firm's website. “Giants are arrogant and terrifying bullies, and they try pummeling the little guy with their superior size, weapons, and brute strength.” And so, he says, “we must be quicker, smarter, more resourceful, and spot how to win early because combat with giants is never fair. I like the challenge of knocking out a giant.”

According to his family, friends, and colleagues, it's this attitude and approach that makes him so good at what he does.

His sister, Court of Appeals Judge Jane Beckering, says her brother is always looking for ways to improve.



Rob with his family in Florence, Italy

“Rob is such a hard worker that no stone is left unturned as he evaluates the best strategy for his clients,” she said. “He studies new trial techniques, especially the implementation of technology and the use of video. He even bought and learned how to use a drone in order to create demonstrative videos for trial presentation.”

Leslie Caliguri, Rob's friend and his firm's litigation paralegal, echoed Judge Beckering's sentiments, noting that he's always looking for new ways to get an edge for his clients and always seems to be a step ahead of everyone else. His desire to continually

grow and improve will shine through in his leadership with the State Bar, she said.

But perhaps most impressive, they say, is the way Rob treats others, no matter the situation.

“He is genuinely kind and respectful to everyone and takes time to get to know them,” Judge Beckering said. “No one is ‘above’ or ‘below’ Rob in stature. No one. And he's disarmingly funny.”

In addition, she said, he doesn't take personally the slings and arrows flung against him in a litigation battle.

Longtime friend Bill Ryan agreed.

"I can't think of anyone better than Rob to continue [the Bar's] momentum. He is an innovative thinker who will be simultaneously looking for opportunities while anticipating any potential icebergs."

—*Outgoing State Bar of Michigan President Dennis M. Barnes*

"I have always been impressed by Rob's ability to maintain decorum and a sense of humor even in less-than-pleasant situations," and he always has "the best interests of others at heart," Ryan noted, adding that State Bar members can expect "the same kind of sincere and interested leadership from him during his tenure over the next 12 months."

Stuck in the middle

According to Judge Beckering, Rob's birth order played a significant role in both his determination and his adventurous spirit.

"If it's true that birth order affects one's personality, Rob's childhood trauma of being the middle child—I think, 'Marcia, Marcia, Marcia!'—served to deepen and strengthen his character," she observed. "He always put pressure on himself to work harder and be better, yet he was and still is the smartest and most creative kid in the family."

As an example, "when we were kids, Rob used to pencil-draw a cartoon of the evening's babysitting experience, often showing how he was deeply wronged by my older brother's mischief, and leave it out on the kitchen counter for my parents to find when they got home," she recalled.

As kids, Rob and his siblings would ride motorcycles, often building ramps and jumping over each other. But perhaps their fond-

est memories were listening to courtroom war stories told by their father, legendary Grand Rapids trial lawyer Jack Buchanan, around their dinner table.

"When we were kids, our dinner table conversations were filled with courtroom stories, spellbinding cross examinations, triumphant jurors, and lessons in every conceivable accident," Rob recalled. "It was never about sports."

Eventually, of course, law school beckoned. And when he was done, so did a highly sought-after position as a business litigator with a prestigious West Michigan defense firm.

Although his career was trending up, his roots and his desire to fight for the underdog caused him to strike out on his own just months before making partner.

"I wanted to help real people, solve real problems, and no longer serve big companies and wealthy executives in their squabbles over money," he explained, noting it's a decision he's never regretted.

The team, the team, the team

Despite Rob's desire to be the metaphorical David, to take on any fight alone, he also understands the importance of a great team and a healthy culture.

"Rob truly listens," Judge Beckering said. "He never loses his cool and he never makes decisions based on emotions. He's proba-

Buchanan Fast Facts

Education: Kalamazoo College (1985); Wayne State University Law School (1988)

Firm/Practice Areas: Co-founder and managing member, Buchanan & Buchanan, P.L.C., Grand Rapids (1995–present); plaintiff medical malpractice, automobile and trucking accidents, commercial litigation

Bar Association and Related Service: State Bar of Michigan; Michigan State Bar Foundation; American Bar Association; Federal Bar Association; Grand Rapids Bar Association; Grand Rapids Bar Foundation; American Association for Justice; Michigan Association for Justice; International Society of Primerus Law Firms

bly the most even-keeled person I know. And that is reflected in his having long-term staff members."

Although he is in a "very intense, contentious field of practice, his hard-working staff are in the trenches right along with him," she noted.

One of those team members, Caliguri, said the team is so close because Rob attracted the right members and made sure each of them had a voice that is always heard.



Rob with his team in Nepal



Rob and his sister, Jane, in a hot-air balloon

Ever creative, Buchanan developed a culture around the idea of “Seal Team 7, a special operations force of highly skilled, intuitive, and brave soldiers seeking fair and just compensation for the wrongly injured,” she explained. “Every member was selected to contribute to the mission with special and valued expertise.”

Buchanan applies that same creativity in thanking his team for their work.

In 2018, he presented them with a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Nepal, an experience Caliguri says changed her and the team forever.

“We went sightseeing through the unique landscape and culture, hiked through the jungle, and, finally, embarked on a six-day trek through the Annapurna mountain range circuit trek,” she recalled. “It was one of the most challenging yet most memorable trips of my lifetime. The experience changed me as a person. It taught me the value of trying things outside of my comfort zone and embracing physical and mental challenges to become better.”

Most importantly, she said, it strengthened the team's bond.

“It taught us how to communicate better with one another and the importance of remaining cool under pressure,” she said. “And it taught us that in order to im-

prove, you must try new things and have different experiences.”

State Bar members, she said, “should be ready for a spontaneous and exciting year with Rob at the helm. I know he will contribute in a positive way to the culture, as he has done for our firm—a culture built intentionally to inspire and do great things.”

Up for the challenge

Rob takes the reins as State Bar president at an incredibly tricky time. But those who know him best say they couldn't imagine a better fit for the job.

Outgoing State Bar President Dennis Barnes, who knows the challenge better than anyone, said Rob's perspective and skill set will serve him and the Bar well over the next 12 months.

“When I was sworn in a year ago, I wasn't expecting to have to steer the Bar through a pandemic,” Barnes observed. “But thanks to a strong foundation and a great team, we not only survived, we put our foot on the pedal and went forward. I can't think of anyone better than Rob to continue this momentum. He is an innovative thinker who will be simultaneously looking for opportunities while anticipating any potential icebergs.”

Rob says his priorities are promoting cutting-edge technology, diversity and inclusion, access to justice, and State Bar benefits and services.

“My primary goal is to help modernize the profession,” he said. “The pandemic and response necessary to practice law have forced Michigan attorneys and courts to embrace digital technologies, including computer files, electronic filings, videos, and remote tools. Ensuring technical competency will be an important focus during my term.”

Meanwhile, he says if he could only accomplish one thing this year it would be making sure that every attorney who needs help with technology gets the assistance they need.

Judge Beckering said she expects nothing less.

“To the extent members of the Bar are facing Covid-related or other challenges in law firm management or in the representation of their clients, Rob's innovative thinking will help Bar leadership best serve its members,” she noted.

“It's a giant task,” Barnes said. “But like David, Rob is up for the challenge.” ■

Lynn Patrick Ingram, Esq., is publications development manager and legal editor at the State Bar of Michigan.