

Dad, is Soccer the Most Important Thing in the World?



Edward H. Pappas

It was a miserable, cold, rain-drenched morning in October 1985. My older son, Greg, was six years old and playing defense on his soccer team. I was standing, frozen, with the other parents rooting for our team. The game was tied with one minute to go and the opposing team was driving down the field toward our goal. The player with the ball had gotten ahead of everyone except Greg and the goalie. Greg had long since lost track of what was happening in the game. He was looking up at the rain and chewing on the strap of his jacket. He was now the focus of his coach, his teammates, their parents, and me. "Greg! Greg! The ball is coming your way. Get ready!" These pleas never hit their mark. The other team drove right past Greg and scored the winning goal. Just about that time, the other parents appeared to move away from me and whisper to themselves. I could only assume it was about Greg and his dad.

On the drive home after the game, I tried to explain to Greg what he had done wrong. I stressed that if he had only paid attention

to the game, he might have prevented the winning goal. I then began to detail exactly what he needed to do to get ready for the next game. Before I got too far, however, Greg interrupted me with a simple question: "Dad, is soccer the most important thing in the world to you?"

Greg's question stopped me in my tracks. Actually, I didn't even like soccer, having never played the game myself. I realized that I had gotten caught up in the moment. I forgot what was really important. I let my own embarrassment, and ego, get in the way. "No," I responded to Greg, "soccer is not the most important thing in the world to me. I know you tried your best, and nobody could ask any more of you."

Now, when I am in the heat of battle in litigation and I start to lose sleep thinking about my case, I remember Greg's question, and I ask myself: "Is winning this case the most important thing in the world to me?" The answer is always "no." Not that I don't want to win, because the truth is that winning is important to my clients and me. But winning is not the "most" important thing in my life. There are many things

I value more than winning—my family, friends, integrity, health, and happiness, just to name a few.

This doesn't mean that we lawyers shouldn't work our hardest and do our best to win the case for our clients, assuming that the case cannot be amicably resolved, or to negotiate the best deal we can. We should not, however, get caught up in the moment and let the strong desire to win take control of our lives. If that is occurring, then we need to ask ourselves, "Is this case or deal the most important thing in the world?"

In these difficult economic times, especially during the holiday season, it is helpful to remind ourselves of all the blessings we have and not dwell on the negative. Success in terms of victories and money does not guarantee good health or happiness, and no amount of money can ever replace friends and family. When we are at the end of our lives, we won't be thinking about our legal victories and defeats; we will be treasuring our relationships and the people about whom we care the most.

The practice of law already demands much of an attorney. A dominating need to win at all costs can only exacerbate the pressure and transform the practice of law from a satisfying and enjoyable career to a heavy burden. If we constantly remind ourselves of what is really important and balance our work with these things, our lives will be much more enjoyable and less stressful. And, believe it or not, we will still win our share of cases and negotiations. I, for one, do not want to look back at my life and realize that I ignored the things I valued the most. What about you? ■

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