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IT'S RELATIVE

## The worst client ever

Tracey I. Batt, Esq. / Special to NLJ.com

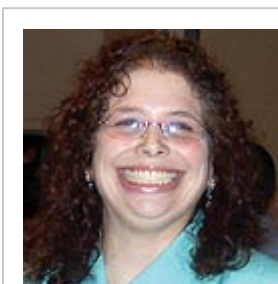
November 2, 2009

I have been having a bad run of luck recently. Things started off well enough. After a [highly successful fundraising event](#), I embarked on a much-anticipated and well-earned vacation. A week in a unique European city, letting the quiet and the history and the music and a millennium's worth of art wash away the worries of a bad economy and too many closely grouped deadlines. The human mind cannot dwell on politics, petroleum prices, or Profit and Loss Statements when it is busy trying to figure out how to say "How much for the ones with the hazelnuts?" in Italian.

Not owning an international cell phone, I could not contact the U.S., and it could not contact me. However, through some karmic eddy in the time-space continuum, the late innings of most of the Phillies-Rockies playoff games were beamed via satellite directly into my 600-year-old hotel room just as I was winding down at the end of the day. Ahhhh. Of course, ingesting large quantities of gelato and fresh pasta with seafood didn't hurt, either.

Unfortunately, it seems that, for each karmic boon I receive, there is a wildly excessive karmic rebound just over the horizon.

I spent a full day in the company of angry Americans as a woefully unprepared airline tried to figure out where to



New Jersey Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts' Tracey I. Batt

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warehouse an entire cancelled flight's worth of people for 24 hours. Those 24 hours turned into 48 hours. Needless to say, grumpiness set in. When I finally returned to work two days later than planned, there appeared to be at least three weeks' worth of email, voicemail, and mail piled on every real and every virtual surface. Apparently, there is some sort of geometric progression of communication. It is accompanied by a geometric progression of grumpiness.

I triaged. I prioritized. I figured out a game plan. I attended meetings. I got over my jet lag. I started to fall back into my old rhythm. I made "To Do" lists that included things like "make a 'To Do' list" and things I had already done just so I could cross them off the list with a smug sense of accomplishment. I made headway.

I got rear-ended.

Then it was time to make an entirely different "To Do" list. Determine that nobody involved is in immediate need of emergency medical assistance. Look at the damage to the cars. Call the police. Call my father, the attorney with nearly half a century of automobile negligence experience, and tell him that he's not allowed to retire just yet. Pose for a couple of X-rays. Become absolutely, without a doubt, the worst client an attorney could ever have.

They say that an attorney who represents him or herself has a fool for a client. What they fail to tell you is that an attorney who represents another attorney, particularly if that attorney is a family member, has an annoying back-seat driver for a client.

My father and I have had very different legal careers. I spent seven years at a behemoth firm in New York City; he has spent 46 years at a small-town firm that has never had 10 attorneys at the same time. I focus on copyright, music licensing, and arts and entertainment law matters; he focuses on personal injury matters and has negotiated the labyrinths of property damage and personal injury claims for thousands of clients. Why am I being so demanding, micromanaging my representation, as though I know more than he does, as though I know everything, when he has done this every day since Kennedy was President? I have no idea.

I am like a perfect storm of terrible client. I always have had a vicious temper. I am an attorney. I am the daughter of an attorney. I worked in various capacities in my father's law office, on and off, for almost 20 years before I went to law school, watching his every move. Then I analyzed the techniques of some of the most fearsome disputants in the legal industry during my tenure in New York.

Someone once chided me for "losing my temper" with one of his employees. I laughed. "No," I corrected. "I snapped. If I had 'lost my temper,' your employee would be lying on the floor in the fetal position, bleeding from her ears."

For all intents and purposes, I am a professional arguer. So is my father. For 43 years, my father and I have been honing our respective arguing skills to a razor-sharp edge, practicing on each other, often for no other reason than that we are both very good at it. We don't even really need anything to argue about, but when we do have an actual bone of contention between us, the resulting decibel level is high enough to cause tectonic shifts and sterilization of frogs.

And to top it all off, I'm still really grumpy. Dark times are ahead for my poor old dad.

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