

Leading through Adversity

By VIANCA T. MALICK

It is no secret that these are trying times both in our country and in the world. As chair of the Young Lawyers Section, I decided to devote my theme this bar year to discussing the adversity we face and how, as lawyers, we have the unique opportunity to promote justice, advocate for the misrepresented, and help those in need. For my first article in *CT Lawyer* magazine, however, I wish to focus on the specific adversity we young lawyers face as we begin our careers.

In addition to the adversity we see around us, young lawyers are faced with a certain level of adversity because of our age and level of experience. Whether it's the client who will not accept our recommendations unless delivered by an older lawyer at our firm, opposing counsel who will not give us the same level of respect as a senior practitioner, or the senior partner who will not provide us the legal experience needed to advance in our careers—young lawyers often wonder how best to handle these challenges.

As I prepared to write this article, I searched “leading through adversity” to better understand what advice was given from other industry professionals. Much of the advice I found was given from a management perspective on how best to lead a team through adversity. However, I believe a lot of the concepts recommended to manage a team through adversity can help young lawyers overcome the challenges they face every day.

1. Be Resilient and Embrace the Challenge: I urge young lawyers to be confident in their convictions. Understand

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that any challenge is temporary and can be overcome. Do not let any difficult situation lessen your drive to succeed. “Resilience is not about bouncing back; it's about bouncing forward. It's the ability to adapt, learn, and grow from setbacks, emerging stronger than before.”¹

2. Honestly and Objectively Assess the Challenge: This requires us as young lawyers to control our emotions, which I admit was something I often had difficulty doing earlier in my career and still sometimes do. How can we not take things personally when we are being questioned because of our age? However, emotions can often complicate things and stop us from being able to rationally assess a situation. “Be clear on the difference between true facts (not open to interpretation,) perceived facts (influenced by biases,) and assumptions (not necessarily based on facts.) These set up your conclusions, choices and actions.”²

3. Choose Your Path Forward: After assessing the situation, determine how

best to proceed. This might mean seeking support from other attorneys (and probably more senior attorneys) when needed. However, maintain control over the situation. If it is a difficult client you are dealing with, bring a more senior attorney to your meeting with the client, but keep control of the narrative. If you are dealing with difficult opposing counsel, earn their respect by continuing to be professional and not diminish yourself or your abilities by taking anything personally or “stooping to their level.” If you want to be assigned cases with more difficult or complex legal issues, schedule a meeting with the senior partner at your firm. Be open and honest about your needs and the importance such cases will have in advancing your skills and abilities which will benefit the firm. All of these situations will require you to practice effective communication. Be transparent and foster open dialogue. “Choices follow conclusions. Distinguish between what you can and cannot change. Then focus on pragmatically optimistic outcomes....”³



"You can't change how people treat you or what they say about you. All you can do is change how you react to it."

— Mahatma Gandhi

As chair of the Young Lawyers Section this year, I hope to remind young lawyers to feel empowered in their status as "young lawyers." As young lawyers, we are the future of the legal profession and there-

fore have the power to shape the legal culture for future generations. Part of the Young Lawyers Section's mission is to help shape the policies and priorities that affect young lawyers and the legal culture in which we practice. I hope the Executive Committee of the YLS will advance this mission by focusing our section's educational efforts towards areas we feel are important to the young lawyer community; organizing social and networking events to help foster close relationships between young lawyers in our state; and use the relationships we secure with leaders of the bar, the judiciary, and up and coming leaders of the CBA to assist in the change we wish to see in our legal community.

As young lawyers we are often told the challenges we face should be expected and are a "necessary evil" we must overcome. Although I agree adversity can make us more resilient and difficult experiences can strengthen our resolve, I question whether such adversity is really something we must all face to advance in our careers. I urge both older young lawyers and senior members of the bar to challenge this status quo by embracing young lawyers and creating a more supportive environment for the future of the legal community in Connecticut. We should all be advocates for each other in times of adversity.

I also urge all young lawyers to take advantage of their membership in the Young Lawyers Section. Attend a YLS Executive Committee meeting, come to a networking event or attend one of our CLEs. Being a member of the Young Lawyers Section provides new practitioners with a net-

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work of similarly situated colleagues who can serve as a support system in times of adversity. ■

NOTES

- 1 Hari Sholinghur, *Leading Through Adversity*, LINKEDIN (June 27, 2023), <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/leading-through-adversity-hari-sholinghur>.
- 2 George Bradt, *Three Essentials In Leading Through Adversity – Especially In A New Role*, FORBES (Nov. 10, 2020, 07:00 AM), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/georgebradt/2020/11/10/the-three-key-steps-to-leading-through-adversity/?sh=7900657036ea>.
- 3 *Id.*

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