



BY HEATHER SUTTIE

No Guts, No Glory

The expression means having the boldness to be your best self so you can achieve great things. Some people have this trait; others are encouraged to find it

AUDACITY is in short supply throughout the legal profession. The giveaway for this dearth of brazenness is the immediate question “Who else has done this?” whenever a novel concept requiring change is under consideration. For anyone hankering to be No. 1, audacity is a must-have. And it doesn’t mean swagger or arrogance. It refers to confidence, spunk, bravery — characteristics that are apparent in those who break out of the chorus line to become the star of their own show.

So why then does “sameness” seem to be so prevalent in the legal world? If movies and television were to be believed, sameness would mean that all lawyers were gifted with sharp minds, sharper tongues and even sharper suits. What nonsense.

BEING DENNY

Part of this description, though, does sound quite like the character of Denny Crane, played by William Shatner in the hit television show *Boston Legal*, which aired from 2004 to 2008. While he was indeed turned out in fabulous attire, the founding partner of Crane, Poole & Schmidt was decidedly different.

A legend in his own mind, he would verbally “sign” non-sequiturs and brilliant utterances by saying, “Denny ... Denny Crane.” This was to ensure that those who may not have been aware they were in the presence of greatness would find out fast. This

doesn’t qualify as normal behavior, but perhaps if you, like Denny, have a spotless trial record, you too could get away with grandstanding.

But audacity has little to do with showboat attitudes. Instead, it is a hallmark of those who have the grit to consistently set themselves apart by being their unique selves.

BEING THEMSELVES

Lax O’Sullivan Scott Lisus LLP is a Toronto-based litigation firm known for creatively managing high-profile, complex litigation. But that isn’t the only thing they handle creatively. The firm is also known for levity that extends to April Fool’s jokes, holiday cards and announcements. Case in point: a mock press release issued early this year announcing the firm would merge with “London-based mega-firm Kronick, Blatter, Peign” and change its name to “Lax Blatter.”

Terry O’Sullivan says that when the firm was founded in 1997, they chose to build around three factors: litigation, work by referral, and the reflection of their personalities in the character of the firm. They kicked off the personality factor the first year by sending clients a humorous holiday card featuring themselves. The card was a hit and they’ve sent one every year since. They resonate because, as Charles Scott explains, most of their work comes from people they know. “We have fun with our friends. It’s amazing how many people call to be sure they’re on the card list.”

O’Sullivan says, “I think they’ve translated to a personality of uniqueness. This is how we try to balance the seriousness of what

we do with a sense of humour and lightness.” He describes the humour as slightly irreverent. *Is it ever!* Their 2005 card featured Clifford Lax, Terry O’Sullivan and Charles Scott as Ricky, Julian and Bubbles of television’s *Trailer Park Boys*. When Jonathan Lisus joined last year, the card featured the foursome crossing a street single file à la the Beatle’s famous Abbey Road album cover.

Their cheekiness has also benefited the less fortunate. Riffing off the usual “Top 40 Under 40” programs, they hatched a Top 60 Over 60 event in 2007. As Scott explains, “We invited friends and colleagues of that age bracket to a dinner where guests’ donations were sent to Lawyers Feed the Hungry, a Law Society program supporting the homeless.”

Just being themselves has also attracted top talent. As the firm’s most recent name partner, Lisus says the work was the initial attraction and the firm’s personality cemented the deal. “It’s an innovative, creative and bold culture, and that’s the way we approach our lawyering as well.”

By revealing your character, you can’t help but differentiate yourself. But you’ve got to have the guts to do it; hoping to do it won’t help. Denny Crane had a theory about hope, which he expressed when sidekick Alan Shore was mourning lost hope. Denny spouted, “Hope springs a kernel. Old farmer’s saying.” A corny retort, yes, but very Denny ... Denny Crane. ☛

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