

Don't Forget to Put a Napkin Over the Steering Wheel

By: Brad Cunningham, City Attorney, Lexington, South Carolina

Forgive me as I digress for a few moments before reaching the point of this column. I unfortunately had to attend the funeral of a relative this past month in Charlotte, NC. Attendance was robust, and I saw relatives I haven't seen in over 40 years. We talked and chatted like we hadn't skipped a beat. A lunch / reception followed, wherein stories were told and relived of the "old days" of growing up in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Four generations of family members spun yarns and told tales late into the afternoon before we headed back to South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Nebraska, Arizona and places beyond.

As I hit the interstate for the return trip, I couldn't help but think "Where did all the time go? Will I ever see some of these people again?" It was a melancholy drive home, but left me with plenty of time to think. And, I came up with the answer to my question "Where did all the time go?" I know where it went. It's no real mystery. We are all guilty of it. *I spent it all at the office! Darn it!*

For many of us, it is in our blood. We are in a race to see how productive we can be. Get up early... Eat breakfast on the run... Hit the highway... Thanks to technology, we are able to make a few business calls and even send emails without taking our eyes off the road or our hands off the wheel... Get to work, barely say hi to the co-workers and we're on the phone, online and typing away before our seat gets warm...

If we're really lucky, there is a break in the action long enough to allow us to eat a sandwich at our desk around mid-day. But, we keep at it even during our lunch "break." If we do leave our desk, lunch is often accompanied by work talk and most likely interrupted by phone calls and texts that for some reason seem to command more attention than the person across the table from us. After choking down a chicken breast the size of a golf ball, accompanied by two miniature sprigs of asparagus, a mad dash back to the office ensues.

If we're lucky again, we get to leave the office by 6:00 pm. On the way home, we're still using the phone and dictating emails. Maybe we might begin to think about dinner. But, even that often gets rushed as our day approaches its "end." I once had a colleague in Atlanta who considered a formal dinner as an occasion where he put a napkin over the steering wheel.

True to form, as I hit the door at home in Lexington, I took the opportunity to answer a few work emails and even edit a document. I couldn't help but laugh to myself. Even a funeral on Saturday doesn't get me out of work.

Recently, I have been literally blind-sided by several reminders of the consequences of living a lifestyle like this. I lost a First Cousin this week at the ripe old age of 56. She spent her life working her tail off in the frantic pace of the restaurant business, and unfortunately passed away this week out in Ephrata, Washington, after a long illness.

Closer to home, two legal colleagues who frequently appear in our municipal court both passed away within the last two weeks. Neither had reached the age of 60, and neither had suffered any immediate illness. Colleague number one left work one day, said "See you tomorrow" to the staff, and then never returned to work. He reportedly suffered a massive heart attack at age 55, and just simply dropped dead at home. Colleague number two also died unexpectedly from heart failure, leaving his law partner (who was his wife) scrambling to manage a funeral, a difficult business and her emotions all at the same time.

For all the smears, jokes and laughs we have to endure as lawyers, we have a very stressful profession. Quite often the failure to plan by others becomes our emergency, and we are met with frustration at our perceived failure to "fix" a co-worker's (or client's) problem. And by not having it done YESTERDAY! I wonder how long the average person should be expected to keep up with this pace. And, if we can't slow down, what are we to do about it?

Slowing down, or what to do in our spare time (if there is any) was a recent well-discussed topic on the Water Cooler. A colleague began a discussion about hobbies and what others like to do when they shed their lawyer suits. The variety of answers was very interesting, and shall remain anonymous herein.

As for me, I fish and am an avid sports fan, and I like to travel if possible. One of my bucket list items is to see every major league baseball team play a game. To date, I have seen all but four of them. If anyone wants to invite me to a game in Seattle, Minnesota, Cleveland or Kansas City, please let me know!

Another bucket list item is to visit all 50 states, even if for only a brief time. So far, I have been to 42 states and am missing Ohio, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Hawaii, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. Again, to anyone in these locales, I'd like to come visit.

I also work at night during the summer for a Coastal Plain League baseball team, and when invited, I do radio play by play for high school sports. My next anger vacation (in the early planning stages) is a fly fishing trip to Poudre Canyon in Colorado, the former stomping grounds of my late friend Brad Bailey. I understand his ashes were scattered there.

Other answers to the query (edited) included:

" I crochet. Started 3 years ago, after attending a class at the public library. I went straight to the store and bought yarn and hooks, and watched hours of "how to" videos on YouTube. I joined a chapter of the Crochet Guild of America... Our local guild makes caps for preemies at a few local hospitals, as well as chemo caps and lapghans. We had been making squares to send to Africa as part of a charitable activity ... I have made baby blankets for teachers, coworkers, and a Spiderman cap for a little girl who loves her Spidey!"

"I used to garden, but the two dogs ate or tore up everything green and lovely in the back yard and my sons and I tore out over half of the garden last weekend (sniff). Reading is a favorite pastime, as well as playing card and board games with the family, neither of which get done as much as I'd like."

"Beyond music and walking the dog (or hold-

ing him if weather is bad), I drive for Mobile Meals every other Saturday, volunteer one evening a week at a local community center and spend a lot of time assisting my 95 year old mother.

"My particular hobbies are gardening and home canning. I am helping my youngest son earn his BSA gardening merit badge, trying to cultivate (pun intended) his interest in planting, growing and weeding (hard work, patience, fortitude that goes with any farming venture and the pride in reaping what you sow).

I like being able to learn about different plants - and now have a cause!! I try to help save our bees and Monarch butterflies."

"Cycling and driving, and occasionally still or motion photography. I recently fulfilled a lifelong dream to own a Porsche 911. Now my passions have come into conflict as I can't put my bike on my car, so I have to borrow my wife's SUV when I take the bike out. I usually ride hike/bike trails with minimal on road activity as I figure that increases my odds of avoiding a bike/car collision or other hazard of on-road riding."

"I am a railroad fan, both of current and historical locomotives. I decorate both my office and home study with railroad collectibles and artifacts. I subscribe to *Trains* magazine. A road trip isn't complete unless it includes at least one stop at a rail museum, historic display, ride on an excursion train, or an evening dinner train. *Polar Express* is my favorite modern Christmas movie... And yes, I am very comfortable killing an hour or two just observing the activity in a busy rail switching/classification yard."

"I play badminton competitively. I will be competing in the National Senior Games in Birmingham, AL this June which will be my third National Senior Games competition. I also teach dog training and compete in AKC dog obedience trials. Plus, I serve as an officer in our local dog obedience training club. And I also have a small backyard garden – blueberries, blackberries, a pear tree, and a small vegetable garden."

"I ride quarter horses. I have way too many, and ride 1 – 4 horses most days, unless I have a city council or Cub Scout meeting. My mare won her event at the American Quarter Horse World Championship Show with my trainer, and was reserve the next year with me riding. I've slowed down on showing while my son is young, but I have to keep riding to keep my mind right.

I also think that most horse skills translate into lawyer skills. Knowing what battles to pick-and not to pick one you can't or aren't willing see through right then. Compromise. Working with horses also gives you insight into yourself because they offer immediate and sometimes dramatic feedback as to whether or not your approach is working.

Some days it gives me peace. Other days, I have a horse on its hind legs pawing the air over my head while I try to give him his spring shots, but that makes the angry citizen 30 minutes later seem much more tame in the grand scheme of things."

"My favorite hobby that I do not get to enjoy as much as I would like is scuba diving. The beauty of the ocean and reefs combined with the peaceful underwater world is the best way to unwind and completely de-stress for me. The other bonus is it allows me to sleep very peacefully after diving all day."

"On a regular basis, I work out at least three times a week. Not only to stay in shape but to feel better about sitting most of the day while at work. The job is very sedentary."

"I teach a fitness class at the local YMCA. It's called BodyPump and was developed by a company out of New Zealand. You get a new release (music, choreography notes, education) every 3 months from the Les Mills company that you have to memorize in order to teach the class. It's both a mind and body challenge (for me anyway)."

There you have it. We are a very diverse group in talent and interests. But, a common thread seems to be that none of us get to do these things as much as we would like. Stress can cause very real problems and conditions, and can be the undoing of a person. I'd like to challenge everyone who reads this to figure out more ways to incorporate relaxation and stress reducing activities such as these into our daily lives.

We are not promised tomorrow, folks. And, it seems such a shame in ways to spend most of our time doing something that causes so many headaches, at the expense of something we enjoy. Sure, of course we must be realistic, but I really don't' want to end up like my father. He led a very productive life and had planned a terrific retirement. But, he died suddenly of a heart attack only six weeks before retirement.

My advice? Keep up that hobby... Buy the shoes...Order the good wine... Wait for the head barber... Get the leather seats... Eat steak... Go ahead and take that trip to Europe... Does anyone remember the guy who on his deathbed said "I wish I had spent more time at the office?"... Neither do I ...

The prosecution "rests," your honor... (Hey, is that my phone ringing?) ML

