

SUMMER 2014

from the Section Chair

11 Rules

“Advice: the smallest current coin.”

—AMBROSE BIERCE, *THE DEVIL’S DICTIONARY*

Dear Colleagues,

“IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO, but I can still remember the warning that my antitrust professor gave our class: “Antitrust is a fascinating subject to study in law school, but practicing antitrust law is just the opposite. You will find yourself buried in documents, and you’ll have very little contact with the interesting ‘big picture’ analysis.” At the time I had no reason to question this statement, and it didn’t particularly concern me.

Reality arrived in due course. Early in my tenure as a litigation associate, I volunteered to work on a big antitrust case that had been pending for several years. In my former professor’s view of the world, the case looked like a recipe for alienation and boredom—lots of documents and complicated issues, and large teams of lawyers from several law firms working on it. However, his warning turned out to be completely wrong. Working on that case was a great experience. The lawyers—both from my firm and the other firms—were smart, interesting, and honorable. It seemed like every day brought chances to analyze and discuss “big picture” issues. Thinking up arguments, writing briefs—and sometimes even hunting for documents—were fun things to do. And it was exciting to know that real-world consequences would flow from what we were doing.¹

This was obviously a wonderful way to get started on what has turned into a long and satisfying career practicing antitrust law. But why was my experience—in that first case and the ones that followed it—so different from the discouraging vision that my law school professor presented and that some of my classmates encountered in their professional lives? A lot of it was luck, of course—that I ended up with people I really liked and could learn from and had interesting things to work on.

However, looking back, I would argue that you are more likely to find happiness and success in practice if you follow certain fundamental rules.² So, for what it is worth,³ here are my 11 rules for your consideration:



1. *Surround yourself with great people.* Find a job with interesting people whom you like and respect, who are smarter than you are, and who will take an interest in you. That last one is particularly important—you are absolutely more likely to flourish if you have a mentor.⁴
2. *Make an emotional investment in your work.* From the start of your career, worry about your clients and matters like you are the most senior person on the file. Think about the world from your clients’ perspective. Take time to understand what is important to them, and why. This mindset will make you a better lawyer, and you will actually find the work more meaningful.
3. *Take responsibility for getting feedback.* Ask your clients and bosses for feedback on your work, and pay attention to it. This is a better strategy than silently hoping to get feedback, and then being disappointed when you don’t, or getting negative feedback when it is too late to adjust your course. You will learn from the feedback, of course. Asking for it demonstrates conscientiousness and courage.

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certain fundamental rules. So, for what it is worth,

here are my 11 rules for your consideration . . .

4. *Get out in the world.* This is a key to business development. Meet as many people as you can, keep track of them, and think about ways you can help them. Don’t turn down invitations. Be curious and stay curious—ask people questions and listen to the answers. And take every chance you get to visit your clients. It reminds them that you exist, and you will learn more about them and their business.⁵
5. *Don’t write or talk like a lawyer.* Keep your writing a conversation with the reader. Use simple declarative sentences and avoid jargon. It will make people (including judges and clients) pay more attention to what you say. And it will force you to understand better what you are saying.
6. *Prepare and work hard.* Effortless success is a myth. Dive in and make yourself indispensable. Preparation gives you a foundation for dealing with the unexpected. It is also a powerful equalizer when you are up against people who have more experience than you do.
7. *Ask for assignments and opportunities.* Don’t be passive and hope that people will figure out what you want. If you see something interesting, volunteer for it. If you want something, ask for it.
8. *If you are feeling stale, shake things up.* In particular, antitrust lawyers should consider a stint in government.

It is often a good way to get more responsibility and acquire valuable insights and experience.

9. *Be kind.* Recognize and give credit for contributions of others. Celebrate your victories. Keep your word. Play fair with opposing counsel and treat subordinates with respect. When you are done with work, savor your time with family and don't "act like a lawyer" at home.
10. *Count your blessings.* The job is demanding, but so are lots of jobs. As a lawyer, you get to learn new things all the time, and get paid while doing it. The supply of new challenges is inexhaustible, and you can never say that you have mastered the job. It is a privilege to do work that keeps challenging you.
11. *Get active in the ABA Antitrust Section.* I first got involved with the Antitrust Section over 20 years ago. It has been the most rewarding extracurricular professional activity of my career. There is no better way to keep up with developments, meet important people in the antitrust world, learn relevant skills, or polish old ones. It is an inspiring and high-functioning community like no other. And as with most things, the more you put into it, the more you get out of it. So if you are not active, I encourage you to

join a committee, volunteer for a project, or write an article. You won't regret it. Enjoy your summer. ■

Best regards,



Christopher B. Hockett
Chair, Section of Antitrust Law, 2013–2014

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- ¹ Don't get me wrong. It wasn't all rainbows and unicorns—there were hard days and tedious assignments. But overall I considered it a privilege to be entrusted with such important work, and found it to be stimulating, fun, and challenging.
 - ² Some of them could correlate with happiness and success in life, too. However, that is beyond the (official) scope of this Chair's Letter.
 - ³ See Ambrose Bierce, *supra*.
 - ⁴ And—I submit—finding a mentor will be easier if you follow the other 10 rules on this list.
 - ⁵ Also, new business opportunities often materialize unexpectedly when you are wandering the halls of a client. ("Hey, I've been meaning to call you . . .").