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## Just in Time for Valentine's Day, a Love Letter to the Law

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*Special to the Legal*

The Christmas tree is mulched, the latkes have been eaten and the holidays are behind us. (Sigh of relief!) But now it's February, and a lawyer's fancy turns to ... love? With Valentine's Day around the corner, we thought we'd celebrate by dedicating our column this month to attorneys here in Philadelphia who love lawyering. And we're not talking about ordinary job satisfaction; we're talking about passionate, jump-out-of-bed-in-the-morning love of our work and chosen profession.

First, we admit that it's contrary to the collective wisdom to talk about loving what we do. We've all heard about the surveys showing widespread dissatisfaction with the practice: Our jobs are difficult and draining; our clients expect the moon; the competition is tough. Our daily lot is to engage in intractable conflicts where repeated efforts at resolution have failed or to anticipate and prevent worst case scenarios. Sometimes it feels like we make a living playing a long, unproductive game of dodgeball. What's to love?

Let's start with our ability to contribute to the higher good. Paul J. Burgoyne, deputy chief disciplinary counsel of the Disciplinary Board of the state Supreme Court, summed up his love of the law with this quote from a famous film: "Every now and then, you get to be a part of justice being done." (See the end



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of this column for the name of the film, the character and the actor who played him.) And as our new chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association, Scott Cooper, aptly stated, the practice of law is "one of the few remaining professions where you can truly change some small part of the world through a mix of creativity, problem-solving and application of time-honored principles."

Our new district attorney, Seth Williams, has a more practical view: The law "gives us all an opportunity to make a real positive difference in people's lives without having to know math."

It may surprise critics of our profession to learn that this "do-gooding" theme was repeated by many of the happy lawyers we interviewed for this article. Nancy Winkelman specializes in appellate work and has written and argued, by court appointment, on behalf of prisoners in several key decisions in the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Winkelman described the ability to influence the development of an area of law as one of the many rewards of her appellate practice. As Winkelman explained, "While you are representing one person, you can have an impact on more than just one case. Your work can shape the law and develop jurisprudence that can help your client today and others in the future."

Criminal defense attorney Dennis J. Cogan also said that he loves the reward of helping people, especially those who are under the most challenging stress they will ever experience. "A criminal defense attorney gets to see the good and bad in each person. People I have represented, who have made mistakes and committed crimes, can sometimes turn out to be the finest people when they are in these difficult situations." Cogan continued, "These people have chosen you to be their champion, and you can help them directly with their very serious problems."

Cogan admitted that this work can sometimes be misunderstood by the public and said many people ask him, "How can you defend those people?" After years of practicing, Cogan says, "It doesn't bother me anymore.

No one who hasn't been on the wrong side of this can imagine themselves having to fight the government. We're different; we like to be fighting for the underdog. We don't march to the same drummers. We challenge the institutions."

We also love helping businesses in distress. Natalie Ramsey, chairwoman of the bankruptcy and corporate restructuring section at our firm, agrees that assisting companies in rebuilding and rebounding from disaster is one of the most positive aspects of her bankruptcy practice. "It's rewarding to be able to guide an organization through difficult times, and help put a client back on the right track. Whether I'm representing the debtor, committees, or an individual creditor, there is an opportunity to improve the client's position, either restoring the business or minimizing the damage."

Helping others and contributing to the greater good isn't the only thing we love. We're smart and we love using our brains. Speaking about her appellate practice, Winkelman said one of the things that caused her to fall in love with appellate work was that each case required her to develop and learn about a new area of the law: "I am still always learning and always challenged; each substantive legal area can be understood a bit differently from an appellate perspective."

Cogan, who spent a year gearing up for the recent criminal trial of state Sen. Vincent Fumo, said, "For me, criminal defense is using my brain to do good, but it can also be tiring. After the Fumo trial, I was drained and exhausted. I took a step back and recharged. Now I'm working some tough cases and I can feel myself embracing the intellectual challenge again — it can really

get your brain working on all burners."

Ramsey agreed that part of the fun of bankruptcy work is coming up with creative solutions when the odds are against you. "Sometimes the parties are just ready to throw in the towel; then the challenge for me is how to get them to see that it's in everyone's best interests to get back to the table and work through the rough parts. Thinking through the issues from each player's perspective can be a daunting intellectual exercise, but it's often the only way to get everyone to work together; when that happens, it's a good day."

Along with the creativity, the reward of helping others, and the intellectual exercise, each of the attorneys we interviewed spoke about something else they loved about their practices: personal fit. Last year, our colleague, Peter Goldberger, received the President's Award from the Pennsylvania Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers for his dedication to his work as an appellate lawyer representing criminal defendants. In his acceptance speech he described fit this way: "As criminal defense lawyers, we are extremely lucky, because we get to do work that matches who we are and what we believe. And for that, I am truly thankful."

For each of the happy lawyers interviewed here, their work suits their natures and has become a part of their identity in a way that feels comfortable to them. These happy attorneys are hard working, intellectually curious, caring, altruistic and committed; in the office, their whole selves are engaged. What's not to love?

Back to our first quote from Paul Burgoyne: the character he quoted was Andrew Beckett, a fictional associate fired by a fictional white-shoe law firm because

he had AIDS. The movie's plot is driven by Beckett's suit against the firm for wrongful dismissal. Beckett was played by Tom Hanks; his lawyer, Joe Miller, was played by Denzel Washington. The name of the film: "Philadelphia." •