

Closing Argument OR *Razon Amiento Final*

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By Joel H. Mirman

When I was eight years old and helping out in my dad’s grocery store, I concluded that milk cartons needed translucent slits in their side so that the level of remaining milk could be seen. My father humored me and sent a prototype to the packaging company. Thanks, but no thanks, was the response. Now my container of liquid Tide has a translucent slit. When I was a new lawyer, I persuaded my bosses to invest in this new technology called videotape so we could provide video depositions on reel to reel tape to lawyers who had never heard of videotape. Legal Video Corporation was born and died in short order. Now video is ubiquitous. In 1990, my friend Phyllis Ives and I started a company that “rented” lawyers and paralegals by the day, week or month. People thought we were crazy. Now the concept is so much a part of the legal landscape as not to draw a comment, let alone a skeptical remark. So I was never “a day late and a dollar short.” More accurately, I was a year early...but still a dollar short. None of these brilliant schemes enabled me to retire in the lifestyle to which I’d like to become accustomed.

And now I’m at it again. But this time I may have it right. I’m still practicing law at Adams Babner & Gitlitz, but now I’m telecommuting as much as possible from my place in the sun in Mexico. I’ve got a computer, a printer, a scanner and a fax. I’ve got Skype and this clever little piece of hardware called Magicjack that thinks my phone is in Columbus, even though I’m in Mexico, and I’m disgustingly accessible. You can even see my smiling face on Skype ... and believe me, in January I’m smiling much more in 85 degree weather than when I’m facing those wonderful gray, damp and cold days in Columbus.

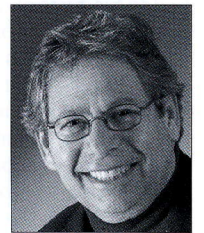
You may question how seriously I can be taking my practice if I’m doing it from Mexico. When people used to ask the same question about temporary lawyers, my response would be this: “Would you rather have a lawyer put in an 80 hour week, knowing that when she finished the project she would roll right into another killer project, or a lawyer who knew that when the first project was over, there would be time to “restore her tissues.” To those who doubt my approach, I ask the same question: “Would you rather have me work on your problem after a relaxing, head-clearing walk on the beach or after slipping on ice in the parking lot on a typical Columbus winter day?”

I’m not alone in my approach. I recently spoke with RoseAnn Rotandaro, one of the founders of Virtual Law Partners LLP (www.virtuallawpartners.com). VLP is a virtual law firm with no bricks and mortar office. Started in 2007, the firm is growing rapidly and now has approximately 40 lawyers, none of whom “go to the office,” yet all have active, sophisticated practices. Their pedigrees come from schools such as Harvard, Georgetown, Stanford and the University of Virginia, and they have worked for some of the nation’s largest firms and corporations. But VLP has turned the law firm economic paradigm on its head. Instead of the old notion of one-third to compensation, one-third to overhead and one-third to profit, VLP lawyers retain 85% of their fees. If that’s not enough to keep them away from the “office,” I don’t know what is.

So come visit me in cyberspace. It’s a sure bet I’ll be smiling.



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