



In Praise Of Homerooms

*The truth is, we can create a homeroom wherever we find ourselves.
They promote career satisfaction and a sense of well-being among lawyers.*

By Dennis Coyne

You and I know lawyers who enjoy their practice of law, and we know those who do not. And as for ourselves, we are aware that some things we do sustain us and enable us to be more effective as lawyers, while other things we do undermine and defeat us.

In my thirty-five years of practice, and in my recent years as a career coach, I have observed lawyers doing some things that clearly lead to career satisfaction. I would like to identify one of these practices for you, in the hope that you will be inspired to take action, and bring more satisfaction to your practice of law.

But As A Lateral Hire, Where Was My Homeroom?

In mid-career, I left government service for private practice at a mid-size firm. A few years later, I joined a much larger law firm and came to understand the significance of being a lateral hire.

Most of the lawyers at the firm had started as associates, and they identified themselves by the year they had joined the firm, for example, the class of 1980. Each class watched out for its own members, and took care of them. It made sense, as they had grown up together at the firm and had supported one another in the quest to being named a shareholder. Each class had its own homeroom.

But, as a lateral hire, where was my homeroom? I wasn't part of a class of recent law school graduates hired in any particular year. And I hadn't joined the firm as an associate. So, I didn't fit into the established social order, and I didn't have the benefits of those who did. Other lateral hires found themselves in the same place.

We Came To Call Ourselves The Boltons

So, a couple of us laterals decided to create a homeroom of our own. We sent out a notice to all laterals, inviting them to lunch in one of the conference rooms. The only expense to the firm would be the cost of the box lunches, and the hour that each of us spent together in conversation rather than eating at our desks.

We quickly decided on a name, after one of the laterals returned from London. There, laterals are described in terms of being bolted onto the firms they join. Specifically, they are called boltons. So, we came to call ourselves The Boltons.

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One Of Our Laterals Had Driven A Golf Cart Across America

Each of our meetings had a two-fold format. First, each luncheon featured one lawyer who introduced him or herself. We allotted an ample thirty minutes for the introduction.

At first, lawyers often completed their introductions in five minutes, or less. But, we asked questions and more questions, and it quickly became a conversation among newfound friends. Where did you grow up? What did your folks do? How did they meet? Do you have siblings? Why did you become a lawyer? What are your interests? Married? Have children? What are their interests?

We learned that one of the laterals had driven a golf cart across America. Another had chosen law school, rather than studying music at the Juilliard School. Yet another regaled us with stories of growing up as a youngster in an ethnic neighborhood of Boston, and the wonder of touching the block of ice that cooled his Grandpa's icebox. One brought a family scrapbook, with photos of her immigrant grandparents, staking a homestead in South Dakota. Simply put, we got to know one another, as friends do.

I Found Myself Cross Selling My Clients To Other Boltons At The Firm

Second, each lateral addressed how they wanted to grow their practice, and what we might do to help them. For example, some wanted access to certain businesses, or introductions to specific individuals. Others wanted to do CLE's, write and publish articles, or do public speaking. Because we had gotten to know and like each other, we wanted to be helpful. For example, I found myself cross-selling my clients to other Boltons at the firm. Naturally, my practice grew, as did the practices of the other Boltons who had decided to create a homeroom of our own.

When I left the large firm and began my work as a career coach, I continued to practice law, but now as a solo practitioner. Once again, I had no homeroom.

In Our New Homeroom We Want To Support One Another, Champion The Profession And Encourage Its Evolution

Recently, I joined with about ten lawyers to form a homeroom. Some of us were friends, but others do not know each other. We come from large and mid-size firms. One is a law professor; another is a county prosecutor. A few of us are solo practitioners, while others are in the legal departments of large corporations. We are a mix of ages, with an even mix of men and women.

We don't yet have a name for our homeroom, and we're not certain how to describe ourselves. Yet, the common thread that brings us together is a desire to integrate who we are, and what we value, into the work we do as lawyers. We want to support one another, champion the profession, and encourage its evolution.

So, once again, I have a homeroom. I have a place of belonging, and I am welcome there. In saying this, I am reminded of the words of the poet, David Whyte. In his poem, *The House of Belonging*, he observed: "There is no house like the house of belonging."

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If You Don't Have A Homeroom Of Your Own: Create One

The truth is, we can create a homeroom wherever we find ourselves. The thread that binds each homeroom will be distinctive. Yet, in my years of practice, and my work as a career coach, I've seen these homerooms promote career satisfaction and a sense of well-being among lawyers. My suggestion to you: If you don't have a homeroom of your own, create one. I think you will be the better for it.



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