



A LIGHT HEART AND FOCUSED MIND IN THE LAW

Part Two: Playing Nice in the Firm Sandbox.

Nice things are nicer than nasty ones. Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*

I. INTRODUCTION

This is the second installment of my series on thriving at work (and in life). In the first, we tackled mental wellness and self-stewardship. Today, we will explore best practices for getting along with the folks in your office. What follows are some basic ideas on how to make the legal profession more wonderful and less challenging. I hope that you will benefit from them, and that you will find joy and fulfillment in your career.

II. IT'S MOSTLY COMMON SENSE.

Be yourself.

I like you just the way you are. Fred Rogers

Don't try to be someone you're not. [Impostor syndrome](#) is a false narrative. You didn't get where you are by accident, luck, or by some simple twist of fate. You deserve to be in this room with all these folks (who are likely feeling just as scared as you are). The hiring folks who decided to invest time and money in you are smart and discerning. They saw ability and moral character in you.

Finally, don't worry about being the smartest person in the room. Just be one of the (genuinely) nicest. That shouldn't be hard; you'll just keep being yourself, and success (in the best sense of that charged word) will come your way without having to try so hard.

Be honest.

Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive.

Sir Walter Scott

Be honest about everything with every person. As soon as we tell a lie, we create a toxic burden with a long half-life for ourselves. Do not hide a mistake. It is highly unlikely you will be let go for making one; it is quite possible that you will be let go for lying about or trying to conceal it. The more we struggle in the net of deceit, the more tangled up we get. (Remember that early scene in *Thor, Ragnarök*?)

Plus, it's pretty hard to take authentic, humble pride in our achievements unless we have the integrity and courage to own our mistakes. Don't sweat it. People will admire you for having the honesty to come clean. When a problem crops up, don't finger-point. Instead, immediately advise the folks who need to know, call your mentor for quick advice, link arms with your team-mates, and work the problem.

Listen well and don't brag.

Listen attentively so that people feel heard (even when they're boring you). Don't interrupt or hijack the conversation in hopes of duping colleagues into thinking you're the smartest person around. Nod and make good eye contact. Good listeners ask good questions. Don't try to impress people. It's selfish; no one wants to hear your braggish daily "Ain't-we-great-end-of-the-year letter."

Just do the "right thing."

What an easy sentence to say. Of course most of us want to do the right thing; the hard part is knowing what the right thing is. I struggle with it, but when I take a shot at honestly answering the following questions, it helps me navigate this foggy landscape:

- Am I discharging my ethical and moral duties to my colleagues and the firm?
- Have I locked my ego and insecurities in a padded, soundproof room?
- Am I letting financial interests unduly influence me?
- What would a person whose integrity I respect do? (I often think of Robert Redford and Bryan Stevenson.)
- Have I been honest and transparent, especially with myself?
- Have I consulted people I trust?
- Did I make the hard decision, or did I choose the path of least resistance?

- Will I be comfortable with my actions and decisions in a year?
- Have I treated everyone involved just as I would wish to be treated?

III. CONCLUSION.

This isn't higher math, Friends. As usual, the truth is in the cliches: Be nice, have some fun, spend less time stressing, more time exercising and taking mindfulness breaks, and be as nice to yourself as you hope others will be to you. After all, Mr. Rogers liked you just the way you are, and he was always right.

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A former member of Princeton's varsity tennis team, Cam is an avid cyclist, and the proud dad of two adult children and a sweet little grandchild. A native of the San Francisco Bay Area, Cam now lives in San Anselmo, CA with his spouse, Laura Docter, a health coach and educator.

