

LIVING A FULL LIFE*

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Until I was asked to write this Essay, I never reflected on how it is that I have managed so many activities and interests. For most of my life, I have been very involved in a number of activities; however, as my time-management skills increased, so did my interests and commitments. For example, while I was at Stetson University College of Law, I participated in the *Law Review*, as Executive Editor and Managing Editor; I was Student Bar Association Secretary for two terms, and an Honor Court Justice. I served on the Freshman Orientation Committee and chaired the Academic Affairs Committee. In Freshman Moot Court, I received the Outstanding Argument of Day recognition, and my partner and I won second place in the Client Counseling Competition. I was Marshall (Rush Chairwoman) for Phi Alpha Delta legal fraternity, and was Inns of Court Chair. I had the honor to serve as American Bar Association/Law Student Division: Campus Representative. To top it off, I was a member of the Trial Advocacy Society and the Portia Society (the Florida Association of Women Lawyers predecessor). I sold a bar review course and was selected by the school for one of two “paying” positions with the Legal Aid Clinic in Dade City. Then, at graduation, I learned that I had graduated first in my class of 107 students. To this day, I tell my husband, whom I met and married during law school, that no breach of warranty claim exists; he knew from the time we first met at Stetson that I was determined to do it all.

Since law school, my activities have escalated. Indeed, some would suggest that handling my legal work and our family activities was a substantial challenge, even without the Bar and community involvement. Nonetheless, I have been blessed with a wonderful family. We have two terrific, active daughters, Kristy and Nancy.¹

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** The Author's credentials for writing an Essay titled *Living a Full Life* are detailed in the Appendix.

1. In fact, we spent about a dozen years sitting on bleachers cheering for a variety of girls' sports. One daughter lettered in three sports, the other lettered in five, and they both played on club teams. They also had busy social and academic lives.

Accordingly, my musings on the issue of finding the time to do it all are as follows:

I. A TRULY PRODUCTIVE LIFE MUST HAVE A FULCRUM ON WHICH ALL COMPETING DEMANDS ARE BALANCED

I have many and varied interests, as do most lawyers. This adds marvelous variety to life; however, it can result in a life that spins out of control, without direction. Accordingly, to prevent a total loss of orientation and an overburdening of time and resources, a fulcrum or guiding principle is essential. This one focal point is the balance from which life's choices are determined. The competing demands on time and resources simply are too overwhelming to handle without some guiding principle.

After having had a strong upbringing in church and family, I made a definitive Christian commitment in college. The principle of living my life within God's will and for His service has been my fulcrum. Although I cannot say that I have followed that guiding principle without failing, I know that it is my desire to use that foundation for all of my decisionmaking.

Others choose varying guiding principles, such as success, fame, wealth, or even dedication to family. I know a person who has articulated a goal of being a millionaire by the time he is forty. That principle influences all of his choices. He has not married. He works very hard. He is completely focused on achieving that single life goal. All major decisions are made in consideration of that goal. I am confident that he will achieve it. I am not certain what he will do thereafter.

The most important thing about one's guiding principle may be its endurance. Goals can be attained and new goals can be set, but for a life to remain in perspective, a guiding principle is essential, and that principle should be enduring. Far too many choices and options confront people in today's world. Some yardstick for resolving the issues presented and the options provided must be adopted.

II. ALTHOUGH PRIORITIES MAY SHIFT OVER TIME, ESTABLISHMENT OF CLEAR GOALS IS CRITICAL

After having developed and committed to a guiding principle, establishment of priorities becomes somewhat easier. Those priorities may vary over time; however, at all times, one's priorities

should be established. For example, the young lawyer immediately out of law school should include as a priority the enhancement and perfection of the legal skills that were cultivated in law school. In addition to learning the fundamentals of the trade and the basics in the various areas of law practice, a sense of professional responsibility and pride should be nurtured in the beginning lawyer. No lawyer emerges from law school as an accomplished attorney. At least the first five years of practice must be dedicated to excellence in the profession if any hope of becoming an outstanding lawyer is to be entertained. During those initial years of practice, one establishes a lifetime pattern in the profession. The practice is marked either by professionalism and a devotion to excellence, irrespective of the personal cost, or by short cuts and exigencies to accomplish a task and to earn a fee.

Of course for many during the same time, the priority of family intervenes. These oft conflicting priorities can be the cause of substantial tension and conflict. Equilibrium between the two must be struck with an eye to one's guiding principle and to a balancing of the competing needs. During these times, some of the other techniques addressed below become critical.

Later in the career, priorities shift. Accumulation of wealth, establishment of a firm, or public service are among the priorities many lawyers have chosen as their law practice progresses. For me, maintaining excellence as a lawyer, while devoting substantial time to public service, became two of my three priorities. The first priority, of course, was family.

Frequently, the balancing act was extraordinary. Nonetheless, all three priorities were managed well enough to have a marriage that has spanned twenty-five years, with two adult daughters who are truly marvelous individuals. My law practice has been successful and spans all areas of commercial and real estate litigation, including land use and bankruptcy. Furthermore, I have had great opportunities to serve both in the Bar and in the community.

Now that our daughters are in college and the family demands have become less pressing, I find that the desire to serve the public and the Bar has become an increasing priority. Also, I have been involved in many community activities over the years; I find that my desire for such service has increased rather than subsided.

Young lawyers confront more difficult challenges today than they did twenty years ago. Competition for clients and for billable

hours creates greater pressure and aggressiveness than for past generations of lawyers. The drive for billable hours often consumes the traditional community leadership and service time and talent that lawyers have rendered. Our communities and our profession are poorly served by this shift. Similarly, mentoring, which has been such a critical element of the profession, whereby senior lawyers impart the values and standards of the practice, is available to an ever-decreasing group of young attorneys. I would like to be a part of the movement to return to these ancient fundamental traditions where senior lawyers regularly participate in training young lawyers at the Bar. More than any other single group, lawyers have provided the civic bedrock for our communities. If this foundation is eroded, our society also will deteriorate. The billable hour simply cannot be permitted to consume lawyers to the exclusion of their contributions to the community.

III. LIFE IS BETTER IF IT IS PLAYED AS A TEAM SPORT

It has been said that no man is an island; the phrase actually is gender neutral. Everyone needs a support system, which includes family, friends, coworkers, and business associates. In my case, it also includes a continual dialogue with the Almighty. Again, this relates to the fulcrum proposition, but it also relates to the fact that I believe that team sports are the best. I do not want to tackle the competing demands and challenges of today's world alone.

When people ask me how I get it all done, I generally admit that my mother has been my secret weapon. She lives half a block away from me. She kept the children after school, took them to their various activities, and otherwise saw to their needs. In the busy life of a young lawyer and mother, these functions must be fulfilled and no one person can accomplish them all. I recognize how fortunate I have been to have a mother who was willing and able to be part of the team.

Beyond that, I am blessed with a wonderful marriage and with a husband who participates actively in our children's lives. Under the circumstances, parenting became relatively easy; it was a team sport.

During my early years in the practice of law, I also had the opportunity to practice law as part of a team. I began practice at the Tampa firm of Gibbons, Tucker, McEwen, Smith, Cofer & Taub. The

firm followed a traditional model with partners and senior associates who were mentors and teachers for the new lawyers, who themselves had a strong bond and comradeship. The skills of the practice of law were learned by observation and instruction from experienced professionals and by joint exploration with a group of bright, dedicated young lawyers.

Today, unfortunately, the team experience often is missing; many attorneys open their own practice immediately after law school and they receive no mentoring. Even when a young attorney joins an established firm, the pressure to produce billable hours and the focus on the bottom line often replaces the emphasis on mentoring and professional development. Young lawyers interviewing firms should focus on corporate culture. Determine whether team spirit is fostered and systematic training and mentoring are offered.

IV. FAILURES ARE CERTAIN IF SUCCESS IS TO OCCUR

To achieve anything, risks must be taken. Few prominent people have succeeded at everything. For example, Abraham Lincoln won only one election. Much has been written about risk taking. Indeed, some have said that really successful people have encountered more failures than those who lead more moderate lives. I am convinced that the person who never risks, never succeeds.

My most magnificent successes and failures all have been the result of risk taking. I regret neither. For example, many people know that I was the first woman President of the Hillsborough County Bar Association. Few remember that I had to run for that office twice to be elected. It was a tremendous risk to run for President of the Hillsborough County Bar Association as a woman. I had chaired almost every committee in the bar; I had paid my dues many times over. Nonetheless, the only thing that was certain was that the office would not be "handed" to me. The risk was worth the reward, however. Bar service is extremely satisfying and the opportunity to lead one of the greatest local bars in the country was fantastic. As Hillsborough Bar President, I began committees to focus on solo and small firms and to deal with gender, ethnic, and racial bias. I also began the community liaison committee to facilitate community service by lawyers in our area. The Barrister Ball was my idea as a means to supplement revenues for the Guardian Ad Litem

program. In short, the opportunity to serve the community and the Bar made the risk of running twice worthwhile.

Risks and failures seem to be opposite sides of the success coin. Accordingly, a tolerance for risk, perhaps calculated risk, must be fostered if real success is to be attained. When I first began Bar service, one of my partners advised me to volunteer freely, then do the job well. Few people do this, so recognition and advancement are certain. He was right! I have been actively involved in numerous types of Bar service and I honestly can say that it all has been rewarding both in terms of generating collegial friendships and in allowing meaningful service opportunities.

V. *SWEATING THE SMALL STUFF IS FATAL*

My biggest mistakes have occurred when I have thought more of myself than I should. Keeping one's role in the universe in perspective is essential to maintaining equilibrium. After receiving kudos or recognition, it is easy to begin to believe the press clippings. That mistake can cause real problems. Instead, one is far better advised to be grateful for the recognition, but to remember that no matter how pleasant the accolades sound, they are transitory.

As a corollary, much needless time is spent worrying about minutia. A truly productive person remembers the priorities and guiding principles of her life and places the daily annoyances, hindrances and nuisances in perspective. Mental energy, as well as time, can be futilely consumed in pursuing issues that are of little consequence. Accordingly, the technique of sorting through tasks and opportunities to determine what is most important is essential.

I would like to say that I accomplish a great deal by extensive use of technology, but am a dinosaur. I try to delegate jobs, but I am a hands-on person, and I like to stay in touch with those who are working on projects for me. For example, I like to receive copies of all work that an associate does for me. I review it at home in the evening. Generally, this merely allows me to remain current on the status of matters; however, sometimes I find that I have the opportunity for feedback and mentoring. Occasionally, this habit has allowed me to avert a disaster.

Perhaps one efficiency skill that I foster is only to handle a matter or piece of paper one time and to dispose of it. I constantly have a "to do" schedule running in my brain, although I am not a big list-

maker. Finally, I maintain a constant personal competition to see how many tasks I can accomplish at once or how I can streamline my activities to avoid repetitive acts. These are just ways of life for me.

VI. VIEWING THE GLASS AS HALF-FULL IS MORE SATISFYING THAN SEEING IT AS HALF-EMPTY

Optimism is wonderful. It is difficult to be satisfied when one constantly believes that the worst will occur or that somehow one has been deprived of benefits that are due. The half-full glass is a wonderful metaphor. It allows a person to be satisfied with his or her lot while continuing to strive for improvement. The half-empty glass focuses on what was not given and expects that more will be lost. The distinction is obvious. The optimist is far more likely to succeed than the pessimist. Indeed, only the optimist has any incentive to meet the challenges of life; the pessimist necessarily believes that success and achievement are unlikely.

Meeting each day with gratitude for the glass, which is at least half full (and more often overflowing), provides an extra dollop of energy and enthusiasm for the tasks at hand. When one believes that life is positive and fulfilling, the daily challenges are far more surmountable.

VII. CONCLUSION

I consider the opportunity to practice law a privilege; it is a chance to serve. I find that real professional satisfaction always has come from serving others and the community. To endure the long hours and adversarial nature of the profession merely for money would be depressing. Perhaps that explains the high level of job dissatisfaction. Lawyers traditionally have been a serving profession whose special skill and training have been essential to the effective functioning of our communities. I remain committed to expending all of my energy to fulfill this traditional role.

APPENDIX

Among the opportunities that Marsha Rydberg has served the community are listed below:

- Jacksonville Branch, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Director (1997–present), and Chairwoman (1999)
- Board of Directors, Florida 2012 (1998–present)
- Prison Crusade Board (1996–present)
- Tampa Downtown Partnership, Board (1993–present), and Chairwoman (1995–1996)
- Tampa Young Life Board (1992–present), Chairwoman (1994–1996, 1999)
- Athena Society (1991–present)
- American Land Title Association, Claims Administration Committee (1993–present), and Legal Division (1988–present)
- Florida Land Title Association (1991–present)
- United States Supreme Court Historical Society (1980–present)
- Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce Board (1995–2000), and Executive Committee (1995–1998)
- Tampa Housing Authority, Commissioner (1994–1999)
- Exchange Club, Board (1993–1999), and Chairwoman (1998)
- Florida Commission on the Status of Women (1993–1997), Chairwoman (1996–1998)
- Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, Committee of 100, Chairwoman (1998)
- The Spring Board (1996–1998)
- Mayor's Committee to Review Downtown Development Regulations (1996–1997)
- United States Middle District Local Rules Advisory Committee (1995–1997)
- Ballet Folklórico of Ybor, Board (1993–1997)
- Leadership Tampa Alumni Board (1993, 1997)
- Mayor's Special Selection Committee for Convention Hotel (1996)
- Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, Drug Free Workplace Committee, Chairwoman (1993–1994)

- Health and Human Services Board, HRS District 6 (1993–1994)
- Leadership Tampa (1989–1990), and Legislative Tour Chairwoman (1992–1994)
- Plant High School PTA Board (1992–93)
- Wilson Middle School PTA Board (1992–93)
- Mitchell Elementary School PTA Board (1990–91)
- DACCO (Tampa-Hillsborough County Drug Abuse Comprehensive Coordinating Office, Inc.) Board (1981–1993), and President (1988–90)
- Junior League of Tampa, Inc. — Admitted 1972, Board (1979–80 & 1983–86), and Attorney to League (1983–86)
- YMCA Board of Directors (1977–79), and Downtown Branch Board (1980–83)
- Citizens Advisory Committee to Interlocal Management, Committee on Resource Recovery (1980–81)
- Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council Energy Action Committee (1979–80)
- Hillsborough County Special Citizens Solid Waste Task Force (1979)
- Hillsborough Community College Growth Advisory Committee (1978)
- Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council Citizens Advisory Committee on Water Quality Management, Chairwoman (1977–78)
- Federal Reserve Board School Instructor
- Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church, Elder
- Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center, Friend
- Tampa Museum of Arts, Patron and Friend of the Arts
- The University Club of Tampa

Ms. Rydberg's involvement in the legal community are listed below:

- Hillsborough County Bar Association
 - Legislative Liaison Committee (1996–1997)
 - Second Vice President (1992–1993)
 - Corporation, Banking & Business Law Section, Chairwoman (1992–1993)
 - President (1991–1992)
 - Board of Directors (1986–88; 1989–1993)

- President-Elect (1990–91)
- Treasurer (1989–90)
- HCBA Trial Lawyers Section (1987–present), and Social Committee, Chairwoman (1986–87, 1993)
- Bench-Bar Retreat, Chairwoman (1987–90)
- Newsletter Editor (1986–88)
- Secretary (1985–86)
- Law Day Committee (1979–82), Chairwoman (1984–85)
- Federal Court Liaison Committee, Chairwoman (1982)
- Desk Book Committee (1979–82)

- Ms. Rydberg is the only three time winner of the James M “Red” McEwen Award for Outstanding Service to the Hillsborough County Bar Association (1985, 1988, 1997).

- The Florida Bar:
 - Program Evaluation Committee (1998–1999)
 - Legislation Committee (1996–1999)
 - Board of Governors (1993–1999), Executive Committee (1994–1995 and 1997–1998)
 - Board Review Committee on Professional Ethics, Chairwoman (1997–1998)
 - Business Law Section, Board of Governors Liaison (1997–1998)
 - Federal Court Practice Committee, Board of Governors Liaison (1997–1998)
 - Communications Committee (1995–1996)
 - Disciplinary Procedures Committee (1994–1996)
 - General Practice Section, Board of Governors Liaison (1994–1996)
 - Budget Committee (1993–1996)
 - The Florida Council of Bar Association Presidents (1991–1996)
 - Public Relations Committee (1984–85, 1993–), Chairwoman (1994–95)
 - Rules Committee (1994–1995)
 - Committee on Small Firms and Solo Practitioners (1993–1995)
 - Chairwoman of Disparity in Pay and Opportunity (1991–1995)

- Voluntary Bar Liaison Committee (1989–1995)
- All Bar Conference Committee (1991–1994), Chairwoman (1993–1994)
- Judicial Administration Committee, Vice Chairwoman (1990–1994)
- Code and Rules of Evidence Committee (1988–1992), Chairwoman (1990–91)
- Local Government Section (1978–89)
- Mid-Year Meeting Committee (1987–88)
- Journal/News, Editorial Board (1980–83), Chairwoman (1984–85)
- Special Committee For Women in the Profession
- Florida Bar Foundation
 - Public Information Committee (1990–1992)
 - Law Student Assistance Committee (1990–1992)
 - Fellow, Florida Bar Foundation
- American Bar Association
 - Business Law Section (1992–present)
 - Business Litigation Subcommittee on Financial Institution Litigation, Chairwoman (1992–present)
 - National Council of Bar Presidents, Metropolitan Caucus (1990–1992)
 - Business Bankruptcy Committee (1989–present)
 - Fellow, American Bar Foundation
- International Womens Insolvency and Restructuring Committee
- American Bankruptcy Institute
- Florida and Hillsborough Associations of Women Lawyers
- United States District Court for the Middle District of Florida

- Local Rules Advisory Committee (1994–1997)
 - Arbitrator (1984–1996)

 - Stetson University College of Law
Alumni Association:
 - President (1993–1994)
 - First Vice President (1992–1993)
 - Outstanding Alumni Representative Award (1992)
 - Second Vice President (1991–92)
- Board of Overseers (1994–present); Budget Chairwoman (1995–present)
- Tampa Bay Bankruptcy Bar Association (1988–present)
- Ferguson–White American Inn of Court (1998–present)