



Ramit Mizrahi is the founder of Mizrahi Law, APC in Pasadena, where she represents employees exclusively. She focuses on discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and wrongful termination cases. She can be reached at ramit@mizrahilaw.com.

Message From the Chair

By Ramit Mizrahi

The beginning of the year is a time of reflection for many of us. We reflect on what we want to achieve—and even more basically, who we want to be—in the year ahead. Common resolutions, unsurprisingly, include: taking better care of one's health (exercising more, eating better, losing weight, quitting smoking, and drinking less), spending less/saving more money, spending more time with family and friends, finding another job or gaining a new skill/hobby, and enjoying life to the fullest.¹

For us labor and employment lawyers, the goals of better self-care and making life more meaningful are particularly important. Our 2016 Section-wide survey found that while 85% of us are satisfied with our careers, a stunning 60% report suffering anxiety or depression in a typical month, and 30% feel that our stress levels are unhealthy.² In addition, more than 60% of Section members also direct their aspirations outward, wishing to do more to help people who really need it.³

I often contemplate how to be a better lawyer/citizen/friend/parent/spouse/human. In all of those aspects of my life, the answers are the same: follow the Golden Rule, act with kindness and compassion, give others the benefit of the doubt, and work to reduce suffering.

Sometimes, when I think about the level of suffering in the world, it can be overwhelming. We are flooded with tragic stories and images as we read the news and scroll through our Facebook feeds. Here in Los Angeles, I need only walk a few blocks from my home to see homeless people on the street, many of whom are sick and disabled.

The magnitude of suffering can make us feel small and powerless to effectuate real change, or worse yet, to

become numb. What difference can my efforts really make? But I always shake that mindset when I think about my greatest heroes, the Righteous Among the Nations, who risked and gave their lives to save others during the Holocaust.⁴ Whenever I read their stories, I am awed by their strength, bravery, and willingness to make the impossible choices that they did.⁵ No one Righteous person could singlehandedly stop the Holocaust or save everyone, but that did not deter them from doing what they could.

Most of us are fortunate in that we will never have to make the choices presented to or sacrifices undertaken by the Righteous Among the Nations and the many other heroes like them. But in our personal and professional lives, we each have the ability to make life better for others, whether through actions big or small.

The Talmud says something to the effect that whoever saves a life is considered to have saved the whole world. Or, the pop culture version, from one of my favorite shows, *Angel* (the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* offshoot about a vampire with a soul):

Angel: Well, I guess I kinda worked it out. If there's no great glorious end to all this, if nothing we do matters . . . , then all that matters is what we do. 'Cause that's all there is. What we do. Now. Today. I fought for so long, for redemption, for a reward, and finally just to beat the other guy, but I never got it.


Kate Lockley: Now you do?

Angel: Not all of it. All I want to do is help. I want to help because I don't think people should suffer as they do. Because, if there's no bigger meaning, then the smallest act of kindness is the greatest thing in the world.⁶

A framed photo of Fred Rogers hangs in my office. He is another of my heroes, as he embodied pure goodness. My shoulders relax and my spirits lift whenever I look at the photo. (I also use Mister Rogers stamps. I hope they have the same cheery effect on the mail recipient as they do on me.)⁷ Among the many lessons taught by Mister Rogers were that we are all different and special (and deserving of love), that we should respect and be kind to our neighbors, that we must take care of the most vulnerable among us, and that the little things matter and we can make a difference wherever we are. Mister Rogers showed us how even the smallest bit of kindness can brighten up someone's day and make them feel good.⁸

And this is something that we can all do. In our personal lives, we can treat friends, family, colleagues, and strangers with kindness and compassion. A note in a kid's lunchbox can make them feel loved. A "thank you" and words of appreciation can make a family member or friend feel appreciated. Eye contact and a smile can make a stranger who was having a tough day feel a sense of connection. We can volunteer our time and money to the causes that move us. We can recognize that everyone is doing the best they can in this life.⁹ All these little things add up.

In our professional lives, there are plenty of little things we can do to make life better for others (and ourselves in the process). We can compassionately hold our clients' hands through the challenges of litigation.¹¹ We can get involved in pro bono work, bar associations, or other activities that help others. We can be kind, courteous, and collaborate with our opposing counsel, giving them the benefit of the doubt¹² and possibly even a second chance when they have acted poorly.¹³ We can recognize efforts and compliment our staff and colleagues on a job well done. We can mentor law students and young lawyers, sharing the insights we have learned from our years of practice and life experience. And we can work tirelessly to be peacemakers in our practice, helping bring bitter litigation (and the tremendous suffering that comes with it) to a close when a fair resolution is possible.

So as I reflect on what I hope for 2019, it is this: That I can embody the values that I hold so dear, and that I can be and do good in this world.¹⁴ 

ENDNOTES

1. Gregory Jantz, "This Year's Resolution," *Huffington Post* (Jan. 3, 2018), *available at* https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/this-years-resolution_us_5a4cff60e4b0d86c803c7b1b.
2. Bryan Schwartz, "California Labor and Employment Law Section Survey: We Are Only Mostly Satisfied," *Cal. Lab. & Emp. L. Rev.* (Nov. 2016).
3. *Id.*
4. To read the stories of some of the Righteous Among the Nations, visit Yad Vashem's site devoted to them, at <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous.html>.
5. I felt the same awe in October when Humans of New York profiled some of the rescuers of the Rwandan genocide. See <http://humansofnewyork.com>
6. Angel, Season 2, Episode 16, "Epiphany," quote available at https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Angel/Season_2#Epiphany.
7. I admit that I also bought the Disney villains stamps, but I haven't had the heart to use them—even on mail to my most obstructive opposing counsel!
8. One of my all-time favorite quotes from Mister Rogers: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of 'disaster,' I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world." See <https://www.fredrogers.org/parents/special-challenges/tragic-events.php>.
9. About seven years ago, I read a blog post that has stayed with me since. It gave a moving story that emphasized that none of us know the burdens and struggles that others may be dealing with, including illness and health issues, the death of a loved one, and financial challenges. People do not broadcast that information about themselves, but we would surely treat them with more kindness if we knew of their struggles. We should all assume that each person has their own struggles in this life. They deserve kindness and compassion. If you are reading this note, I urge you to read the blog post, "We Must See Past What It Seems," at <http://bravegirlclub.com/archives/2151>.
10. Another example: In Seal Beach, local residents learned that a couple that owned a beloved donut shop was facing challenges as the wife was in the hospital after suffering an aneurism and the husband was splitting his time between the store and the hospital. Residents began buying donuts by the dozen so that the husband could sell out early, close shop, and be with his wife. <https://www.ocregister.com/2018/10/30/a-sweet-gesture-seal-beach-community-buys-in-bulk-to-help-doughnut-shop-owner-spend-time-with-ailing-wife/>.
11. Although I loved the line from the divorce lawyer in *Breaking Bad* that she was half as qualified and twice as expensive as a therapist (so direct those angst-filled questions elsewhere!), the reality is that we do serve as therapists to our clients.
12. We humans often commit the Fundamental Attribution Error, assuming that internal characteristics explain the behaviors of others, while external factors explain our own. For example, you may attribute your being late to a meeting to unexpected traffic, while your colleague will perceive you as simply not valuing their time. Someone may attribute a person's curt behavior as them simply being an inconsiderate person, where they may have just been having a terrible day. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fundamental_attribution_error.
13. In the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma (in which the Prisoner's Dilemma is played repeatedly against the same player), a strategy called "tit for tat" (TFT) has been a consistently successful approach. In TFT, the player makes the first move "cooperate," and then subsequent moves are to do exactly what the opponent did in their prior move. So if the opponent defects, TFT requires the same at the next iteration (such that the two players may get locked into that indefinitely). Interestingly, a strategy called "tit for tat with forgiveness," involving the random introduction of cooperation (in essence, to try to jump-start cooperation again), led to better results than the original TFT. See <https://plus.maths.org/content/mathematical-mysteries-survival-nicest>. The lesson: parties can enter into a downward spiral once one side acts in a manner perceived as non-cooperating. But introducing some kindness/forgiveness can leave to better outcomes for all.
14. More sleep and a little more exercise wouldn't hurt, either!