

# THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

## Waiting for the next call

Long ago, my mother was the entire legal support staff at our office.

She was great.

She handled everything at home and at the office when my dad became ill, and it was soon obvious I'd better pass the bar immediately and return home from Boston.

There was no call forwarding back then — some 32 years ago — but they had toggle switches installed at the office so that she could answer the office phone at home when she was taking care of my father. As a sole practitioner, he was terrified of people knowing he was ill, but I think at this point he'd forgive me for letting the cat out of the proverbial bag.

Anyway, we got to try two cases together- one criminal, and one civil. He allowed me to argue a motion for directed verdict, which was successful, and we won.

I remember how Mom and I cheered in the first weeks and months when the phone rang, because it indicated I actually might be successful in building my own practice, and hopefully help to resurrect my father's. I couldn't wait for the next call.

Decades later, I'm writing this in the midst of failing miserably at taking a long vacation. Friends, family and trusted people at what has grown into a law firm I'm proud to be a part of, all conspired to alert me to the fact that I was using technology to work almost 24-7. I needed to get away from the phone calls and the e-mails.

I got away for a few nights earlier this month, then wound up in five days of intense CLE classes at the American Association for Justice. That, mind you, was only two weeks after I traveled to Philadelphia for two days of intense medical seminars pertaining to one specific area of the plaintiffs' trial work I do.

When travelling back from the AAJ seminars, the plane "had to have the co-pilot's stick replaced," according to the flight crew.

That's one of those moments when I experience conflicting reactions: I sure as hell didn't want to deplane at 1 a.m., but I also think it's reasonable to wait for a control stick to function properly.

When we finally got back, I got to sleep at 4 a.m., then awoke to a marathon of trial preparation, followed by a trial. I finished out the week trying to make sure I hadn't missed any phone calls — then continued on on my quest for a few days away from the phone.

In the old days, I used to feel sorry for myself because my

father wasn't able to be in the office very much. I soon realized how fortunate I was to have him live long enough for us to work together at all.

At least I could call him to inquire about the other attorneys I was about to work with. That was worth a million bucks — a billion in today's dollars: "Dad, I'm doing a closing with a guy named Irv Kessler."

"He's a true gentleman, Bob," he replied. "As long as it doesn't hurt the client, give him anything he needs."

He taught me to love our profession, and he truly believed there was no more honorable or noble calling. He taught me that the vast majority of attorneys are hardworking, compassionate and want to do what is right, but my father also was a realist.

"Hey, Dad. I just got a case with John Doe," I told him that same year.

"Watch your back at all times," he warned me.

Now when the phone rings, I sometimes have conflicting reactions. Maybe I'm waiting for great news, or maybe it's so far on the other end of the spectrum that the ring evokes an immediate knot in my stomach — I'm fearing bad news, or just waiting to learn whether the kids, or parents, or friends, arrived safely at their destination. You know what I mean.

For attorneys, callers often turn out to be someone whose life is crashing all around them. There is no greater honor than when that person decides you are the one they trust to help them. Against all odds in a planet of billions of other people, that client decided that you are the one they need in their moment of crisis.

It is a gross understatement to say merely that such confidence causes an equal and opposite reaction- stress and concern that you live up to their expectations, and to your own standards, but one thing remains with me. When the person on the other end of the phone calls you because you are the one person in the world they believe can help them, there is no greater honor.

Actually, deep down in my subconscious, I still cheer when the phone rings. When I get the next call.

*Robert L. Brenna Jr. is a partner in the Rochester law firm of Brenna, Brenna & Boyce PLLC, which his father founded. He is the immediate past president of the New York State Academy of Trial Lawyers and hosts a Sunday morning radio program, "The Brenna & Brenna Law Forum," on WHAM 1180 AM at 8 a.m., online at [www.wham1180.com](http://www.wham1180.com).*



By **ROBERT L. BRENN A JR.**

Daily Record  
Columnist