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No instruction

Okay, so it's a paradox.

Maybe I'm just dense. Maybe we're not supposed to know the answers.

It's kind of a cruel twist of fate that we wait to mature with the hope that as we age we will understand more about life, and it really seems that often we just learn more about how much we don't understand.

Unlike any other known species on the planet, we understand our own mortality, but luckily we don't know what or when it's going to happen.

I keep thinking that if we knew, it would be unbearable. Perhaps the same applies to other dilemmas in life. The economy is uncertain. The health of our children, our spouse, our parents, or even how long a good relationship will last before it may sour are all uncertain.

Yet I can't help but think there is a reason for that. I can't help but think that the mere fact we don't have all the answers means there is a certain driving force within the human psyche keeping us motivated.

We have to hope for the best, and we have to prepare for the worst. We have to keep a stiff upper lip, and simultaneously maintain a rigorous optimism that allows us to get out of bed every morning.

I truly think the most difficult task is to try to help other people you care about through a difficult time. And that sometimes extends to the attorney-client relationship. Some of my friends whom I consider to be the best of the best also are the most stressed. I didn't mean to make that last sentence rhyme, it just kind of happened.

The reality is, there is an ironic relationship between those who care about others, and their ability to maintain their daily schedules without being overwhelmed by stress.

My best friend from law school has been doing criminal defense for his entire career in New York City. He called me a few months ago on the verge of tears. He'd done a masterful job in defending his client. Mid-trial, the district attorney offered such a wonderful plea they decided they could not take the risk of conviction. His client decided to accept, despite the fact he had told my friend that he never committed the crime. That in and of itself may not seem very unusual, but my friend said he was absolutely convinced that his client was innocent.

As he tried to explain to me through his tears, "I did the best

I could, but the possibility that he could have been convicted and sentenced to jail for life was too overwhelming. I just let my client plead to something because he said he had to, but he's told me from the very beginning that he didn't do it, and after I did my investigation I'm absolutely convinced that he's innocent. I wonder if I did the right thing."

Another one of my friends, one of the best trial lawyers I've ever seen, just got a bad verdict on a civil case he knows his client was entitled to win. Despite the fact that he did an amazing job, the case went south. Now he's worried about his client.

So that's the question I leave you with today. I'm not leaving you with an answer, and I'm not sure I have the answer, or any answers for that matter. But I know that when we were born we never were handed a manual with instructions. That's the beauty and the challenge God and the universe gives us — we start out in life with no instructions.

I will say that although I don't accept many criminal cases, I accept some when I have a history of a relationship with the family or, occasionally — and even worse for my health — I take a case based on the fact that I'm convinced the person is innocent. After he told me how sad he was that his client had to plead to anything when he believed he really shouldn't have, my

friend and I went on to discuss the fact that there is no greater stress in criminal law than defending someone who is innocent. There is no greater sadness than second guessing yourself after you've lost a case.

The Constitution presumes our client's innocence, but the truth is that society presumes they are not.

An execution that just took place in Texas appears to have been that of an innocent man. My feelings, my heart and my prayers go out for that soul and to the attorney who had to go down swinging while convinced his or her client was innocent, then one day having to face the fact that the man was put to death.

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