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Synchronicity

It's funny how things evolve, constantly change, then seem to revert back in a full circle.

Many years ago my now dear friend Peter's wife and my wife worked together as teachers. Their school held a talent show for all of the teachers, and a party after. Peter asked me at the party whether I knew any particularly good litigation attorneys. I told him I did, and I suggested several names to him. Since I didn't know him, I had no way of understanding that despite his gruff exterior, he actually had a heart of gold, and really was more of a teddy bear than a grizzly.

"Don't you to do this kind of work?" he asked brusquely

I replied that I did.

"Why aren't you telling me about you?" he wondered.

I explained I simply had a distaste for attorneys who constantly handing out their business cards at social events, that we had met because our wives were socializing as co-workers, and that I was merely answering his question. Then he asked me to tell him more about my practice.

A few days later he called to say he had been "handed some papers." Needless to say the game was on, and he had been sued, as he had anticipated. I undertook the battle, and we became very dear friends throughout the litigation. Initially a temporary restraining order was placed on his business, which meant that if I could not have it lifted his career would be over. He had just started his new business, and his old boss — a person I grew to dislike immensely — was trying to keep him from getting it going, despite the fact they had no non-compete clause. It didn't work and, in the end, he wound up paying my client money, instead of the other way around. Since Peter's probably the best salesman in the world, my investment paid off: I know that no matter where he travels whenever anybody mentions the word "attorney," he mentions his.

I'm not sure whether it was just coincidental, but since he was paid by the hour I thought there was some relationship to his insistence that I accompany him to a time management seminar. I joked that I didn't have time to go, but the fact is I needed it desperately. I actually think he was more concerned about the impact it would

have on my life and practice over whether I would be able to more efficiently keep track of my billing on his file.

I have revisited the list I made during the initial portion of the first of several of those time management seminars. Invariably it starts with taking care of yourself as a person, and those around you, and making sure you have enough time to enjoy life in addition to having enough time to do your work competently.

So the funny thing is that in addition to trying to make sure I set aside items on the list about family and private time, as well as having time to enjoy life, one of my primary goals was to make sure every client had the opportunity to be able to speak freely, knowing I was listening with my full attention. Although I have failed at that on far too many occasions, every time I reread that initial list I realize how important that one concept is.

It's important for parents, too. As they age, we need to listen. When our children are young we need to listen. As they age, or a spouse ages, we need to listen.

A good lawyer needs to listen, and that's more difficult than it sounds.

Anyway, back to the full circle I mentioned in the first part of this column: We were fortunate enough to have one of the greatest trial attorneys who ever lived, Louis Nizer, speak at our law school graduation. Before I ever met with my first client in my own practice, I listened to

that wonderful man say the most important thing he could impart to us was that we must listen to our clients. He explained that by the time our clients reach our desk, something gravely important has happened in their lives and they need our help. He explained they need to have the opportunity to talk, without interruption, and that they need to we know that we are listening.

I'm not writing this column to teach other people, I'm writing this column to remind myself.

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