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COOL RUNNINGS

The Power of Perseverance

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Cool Runnings

DO THE WORDS “GIVE UP” MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU? NOT A THING.

As lawyers, we are expected to be prepared in the event that our clients or our board rooms experience adversity, crises and, at times, even existential crises. It is what we have essentially trained for. But what about when our training takes us in an unexpected direction? What about when we face unexpected challenges from the inside? How prepared are we when it comes to a crisis within our own companies and firms? How can we lead our firms and companies through the crisis of the unplanned pivot? *Cool Runnings* will show you how. In this timeless, classic movie, life changing lessons are cloaked in the cover of a comedy. Don't take it for granted. There is treasure happening in the story of a sled from the Caribbean. There is a coach busy trying to secure a bobsled for a team of track stars, while the team struggles to walk on ice for the first time. This team could be our firms and our companies—at times met with skepticism, criticism, mocking, internal conflicts, and external mockery. Yet through bonding, teamwork, and facing challenges together, the team perseveres, all the while implementing some of the life lessons discussed below, ending up gaining confidence and the respect of the entire Olympic athletic community. The same can hold true for us. Follow along....

Throughout law school and practice, lawyers gain technical legal capacities, training, expertise, and valued professional judgment. But in the event of a serious conflict or crisis, lawyers must also make sure they have the intangibles, not taught, but maybe learned on the silver screen. Authenticity, Creativity, Risk Clarity, Vision, Community, Trust, Leadership, Responsibility, and yes, Gratitude. All of these things must be gained without sacrificing the ultimate skill of being able to perform under immense pressure. One must have the ability to grasp new tools and resources in order to overcome any number of unanticipated problems. These are nine “life lessons” that were experienced by a Jamaican bobsled team, and lawyers must keep them in mind in order to be effective in crisis and in high-risk/high-stress situations and environments. While this list is not exhaustive, the good news is, one doesn't have to go to Harvard to pick up these lessons, one only has to click on YouTube and pull up the 1993 sensational gem, *Cool Runnings*. With the help of this movie the following life lessons can be gathered and implemented in firms and across client companies.

Authenticity

While situations will be thrown at your company or your firm that may put you into a tailspin, it is important to always remember your business's core values and to be authentic as you approach any situation. You are the thoughts and operations of your company. You are what you tell yourself you are, and you are what you do. Companies will not succeed if they merely see themselves as an aggregate reflection of the opinions of society. Social media is out there today. *Cool Runnings* taught long before its existence how to deal with this kind of adversity. Know who you are or at the very least who you are not. Failing to do so will cause needless suffering with any change in outside opinions of you. Know why your brand matters. When outside forces apply pressure, as they so often do these days, it is imperative to stay true to what brought you to the pinnacle in the first place. Sanka's wisdom should follow us in all that we do: Let me tell you something rasta, I did not come here to forget where I come from. [...] and the best I can be is Jamaican. [...] if we look Jamaican, walk Jamaican, talk Jamaican and is Jamaican, then we better sure as hell bobsled Jamaican.”

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Creativity

Past solutions to past problems are not always a future solution to a future problem. Cool Runnings brings us into the lives of strong athletes, who know nothing at all about the changes they're about to undergo in their lives. The early part of the movie gives us the following lesson as we watch the characters—track stars all—run a race to a frustrating end. It does not matter what was before. The past is a mere experience. The world is constantly changing, and counsel inside their companies and firms need to be able to adjust and create new solutions, techniques, approaches, and arguments in novel situations.

Risk Clarity

Most of the time it is impossible to completely eradicate risk within a case or situation. This movie is all about highly successful track stars, who have trained and have hopes and dreams far bigger than most. We, of course, recognize this attitude as individuals who were willing to tackle the exhausting journey of law. Beyond the standard box checking experience of gaining a college degree, those in this profession had designs on accomplishing more. As lawyers we had ambitions to be the very best in class. However, Cool Runnings shows us that ambition is not enough. Whenever we pursue something, challenges and problems will soon arise. But in following along the theme highlighted throughout the film, this movie leans into the power of persistence. Firms and our clients face turnover, financial burdens, brand criticisms, liability exposures—acknowledging the risk and leaning into this truth will allow us to focus on effective and efficient approaches to contain and minimize the risk.

Life Vision

This film follows the characters of Sanka and Yul into a conflict about their dreams for the future. Sanka emphatically denies that there is any way to greatness for Yul. The division makes it difficult for the team to find unity. Vision for Life as a team is essential. Be knowledgeable of the core values of your firm and yourself. Know when to pull the “emergency brake” when you sense these values are being threatened in some way. Don't be afraid to put strong goals in front of your team and ask them to expand their dream footprint along with you. Encourage them by detailing your confidence in the team's ability to reach for those goals.

Community

When times are hard, and life gets busy, it is easy to forget that associates and other corporate employees are human too. Employee burnout is high in the legal profession, and the numbers are growing. It is imperative in high-stress situations that managers keep track of the well-being of their team. Focus on the well-being of every employee within a team and firm. Within the movie, the slogan appears, “Unity is Strength”. Recognize that when the well-being of all team members is a focus, the whole operates as a single unified tool. In the movie, there were four very different characters, each with hang ups, each with strengths. When we, as the characters in the movie did, operate and focus on our strengths as a whole, it opens us up to successes not otherwise attainable. As a whole anything can be managed more effectively and operate as one, with one common goal, in support of each other.

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Trust

In the early stages of the movie, we are introduced to the toxic effect of a boastful and ego-driven attitude that is exhibited amongst some employees we as leaders often see in our companies. The one potentially strongest member of the team makes the statement: *“We may be on the same team, but, I am nobody’s teammate.”* One way to discourage this behavior is by creating a culture of teamwork and trust. When firm leadership supports their team, it gives the team the ability and interest in supporting the firm leadership. Engage with team and firm members inside and outside stressful situations in order to foster trust within the team and firm while also promoting personal and professional growth. Doing so in this combination helps turn solo operators into strong links in the company chain. Doing so turns runners into one of the best bobsled teams in the world.

Leadership

Firms and companies must look to their leadership in order to bring the team together to approach and tackle new unexpected challenges. Part of being a successful leader shows up in the movie in the form of the last two vital discussions points discussed below.

Responsibility

The movie emphasizes the anger that some team members have about not being the driver of the sled. In response, the coach makes the following point:

He has to work harder than anyone. He is the first to show up and the last to leave. When the teammates are out drinking beer, he’s up in his room studying the pictures of turns. [...] The driver must remain focused 100% at all times. Not only is he responsible for knowing every inch of every course he races he is also responsible for the lives of the other three people in his sled.

The leaders will make it clear to the team that the top roles come with the most responsibility and the most risk.

Gratitude

Retention is a difficult thing to achieve. Our firms and our companies are constantly dealing with this concept among our employees: *“We often think we deserve more.”* Similarly, in Cool Runnings, when the team first sees what bobsled their coach managed to get, their reactions were ones of shock, surprise, confusion, and disappointment. One sled team member has a different take: *“she is beautiful!”* The movie reminds us of a simple life lesson: complaining won’t fix anything. Attitude is everything. Helping employees constructively lower the bar of expectations seems counterintuitive, but, in reality, it is vital. Appreciating what you have puts you in a position of readiness. Finding wonders on the ground is an ability that all great leaders have. Always have a plan for a crisis.

It seems not that long ago that the thought of the necessity of adaptability and perseverance within a law firm was an obscure concept. Tried and true did not need renovation. COVID-19 changed all of that and gave us all a good dose of reality. After the COVID-19 pandemic, it became imperative that firms find ways to adapt, grow in technologically foreign environments, allow for new and different

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working conditions. Professional life was unpredictable and we didn't know whether or when we would ever return to "normal." We had no choice but to adapt to a whole new system, and our new "normal" has spawned. A track of ice instead of rubber.

All of the vital points discussed above work together to form open, transparent, and vibrant life within firms and corporations. The better the firms adapt and respond to change, the better clients can be served and the better they can in turn serve their communities.