

# The Path We Follow

**At all times, pay attention to where you are, professionally and otherwise, because it shapes where you will go in ways you might not anticipate.**

BY DAN D. GARTZKE

This will be my final president's column, and I would like to end my term as your State Bar president with some personal observations and perhaps some wisdom to pass on to the newer lawyers in the bar.

My advice is this: At all times, pay attention to where you are, professionally and otherwise, because it shapes where you will go in ways you might not anticipate, and be open to opportunities as they present themselves.

When I was in law school in the early 1980s, I had laid out definite, quantifiable career goals for myself. They involved studying foreign languages (French and Polish – I already knew German), being an editor on the new *Wisconsin International Law Journal*, and eventually postgraduate study at a diplomatic academy in Vienna. This was to be followed by a career in the foreign service. If someone had told me at the time that my career path would eventually lead me to practicing family law with Boardman & Clark in Madison, I would have said, "not possible. I know where I'm going."

And yet, here I am, 40 years later doing exactly that, and happy with where I am and what I am doing. My career plans, though they seemed definite when I made them, have changed dramatically, for the better.

With the benefit of looking backward, I can see how every decision I made, every path I chose, led to where I am today. I'm not saying it was an inexorable progression, but I am saying that as I made my choices, personal and professional, I can see that each step along the way set the tone for the next step.

That includes this presidency that I am going to wrap up shortly. I did not start my career with the idea that in my 40th year I would end up as president of the State Bar of Wisconsin. That was not on my bingo card, but it has been a welcome challenge, and it has positively shaped my career even now in ways that I had not anticipated.

**I wish each of you the same pleasure I have had in this profession, which includes the pleasure of figuring it out as you go along, of being nimble enough to recognize a good change, and deft enough to avoid a bad change.**

I think very few lawyers are able to chart out their entire careers from the start. Like me, perhaps they had definite ideas of what they wanted to do, and what they didn't want. Those were probably helpful initially, getting started, but life and careers take different turns.

I have been very fortunate in my career path. I enjoyed what I did, all the time, as I was doing it. I'm enjoying myself now as I face the challenges of being in my position. That doesn't mean there haven't been challenges in my career. There certainly have, and some of them have been significant. Challenging situations are out there, and bad things can happen. But it's important to keep your focus on the importance of the work you do, look for the positive as you move forward, and, of course, keep your sense of humor.

I wish each of you the same pleasure I have had in this profession, which includes the pleasure of figuring it out as you go along, of being nimble enough to recognize a good change, and deft enough to avoid a bad change. I recommend you take a moment from time to time to take stock of where you are, and what path you are following. Find mentors and ask others for their insights. If you are happy, stay with it. But if you are not happy, make some changes. You have that power. Because in the end, the goal is to enjoy meaningful work. **WL**



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