

What Drives Me Crazy How Much

BY MARC LAMBER & JAMES GOODNOW

Why do so many people hate lawyers? We all know comedians take delight in ribbing—or outright slandering—attorneys, but what is at the root of the disdain for our profession? The authors were both raised by lawyer fathers, so you might say that being a lawyer is in their DNA, and they have both been immersed in the legal profession from day one. From debates at the dinner table, to law school (NYU and Harvard, respectively), to years of practicing law at Fennemore Craig, they are acutely aware of the particular peccadillos of many lawyers, including themselves.

And they know those lawyer “virtues” can be crazy-making for those around them. They get it.

“I have a habit of cross-examining people in my everyday life,” laughs Goodnow, “including my family.”

“Thank god my wife keeps me in check, and when I’m over the line, she’ll usually give me a sharp glance and say, ‘Stop going lawyer on me!’”

Lamber smiles and notes that most lawyers see themselves as normal. But they’re just not.

“We’re geeks—we just are, and smart people can often come across as eccentric, especially if we lose touch with what’s really important,” he reflects.

“I walked into a gift shop recently and was stopped dead in my tracks by a coffee mug with a slogan on it that I had to have. It was emblazoned with the saying: ‘I am silently correcting your grammar.’”

Not normal.

At a recent happy hour, Goodnow caught himself instinctively asking a friend to speak

audibly rather than shaking their head, in a classic nod to the dry, dispassionate, analytical nature of some lawyers that often drives mere mortals crazy. For even at a casual gathering, lawyers ensure the sanctity of the record—or something.

Similarly, Lamber chuckles at the many Latin phrases that unconsciously drip from his tongue: “*Ipsa Facto, inter alia, ex injuria jus non oritur*—and la dee da dee da!”

While some of the clichés about lawyers may contain an ounce of truth, Goodnow points to an Altman Weil Inc. survey of lawyers that contained some alarming findings. (Editor’s note: Yes, the authors insisted the “Inc.” following Altman Weil must not be omitted. Because lawyer.)

“In terms of people-skills, where an average person was ranked at 50 on a scale to 100, lawyers ranked well toward the bottom,” grins Goodnow. “Maybe the thin-skinned moniker with a huge ego isn’t that far off.”

Lamber muses on the creativity necessary to be a good lawyer, as well as the childlike behavior exhibited by some senior lawyers across the industry—especially when they don’t get what they want. He pounds his fist on the table and shouts, “Is that a ‘yes’ or a ‘no?’ I need to get this for the record.”

Clearly a cry for help.

So while “Love Your Lawyer Day” is now virtually a national holiday in law firms (Mark your calendar for November 3, 2017), a time to remember all the good that lawyers do, here in no particular order are some more of the things that lawyers do that make every-

one crazy (‘El es un poco loco’ would never sound this good in Latin):

Most lawyers think they’re cool—when, in reality, they’re complete dorks

“I remember at one of the first days of law school, a classmate remarked, ‘We’re finally cool!’” reminisces Goodnow. “I had to laugh, as I was now looking at a bunch of people who were almost as nerdy as I am.



About Lawyers? Time Do You Have?

A Good Look in the Mirror to Reflect on Some of the Annoying Idiosyncrasies of Our Beloved Profession

I had always been ‘the gunner’ in school—the kid in the front row with his hand raised with all the answers—the kid everyone hated. Now, I was sitting in a classroom surrounded by eccentric gunners. Newsflash: Having more dorks in a classroom doesn’t mean we’re no longer dorks.” (Editor’s note: We’d bet the “we’re finally cool” commentator must today totally be an esteemed member of the bench. Goodnow wouldn’t confirm or deny. Because discretion among nerds.)

It’s a profession where being direct and blunt is often rewarded

Lamber is a foodie who researches restaurants on Yelp, and he’s always open to expanding his culinary palette at eclectic eateries. But even he is wary of poorly serving lawyers.

“If the food or the service is lousy, I think that most folks say something to their server, and then hope for the best,” he says. “Lawyers, however, are often inclined to skip right over the waiter or waitress and go right to the manager. Then, in your best New York accent, you have to practice saying, ‘So, what are you going to do about it?’” All while family members and other humans cringe.

Competitive to a fault

Both authors laugh at how competitive they are. And they understand the reality that being book smart does not always relate to being emotionally intelligent.

“I’m the last person you want to play Scrabble with,” smirks Goodnow.

“I’m even competitive with my language,” says Lamber, shaking his head: “What you meant to say was ...”

Lawyer-splaining. It’s the worst.

Contrarians united

“No one likes a know-it-all,” Goodnow chuckles. “You’ll be hard-pressed to find a profession that has more know-it-alls than ours.”

“There’s nothing some lawyers love more than taking an opportunity to highlight their genius by showing someone up—it’s

like Christmas, Hanukkah, a birthday and New Year’s all rolled into one,” he jokes.

But in defense of the profession, Goodnow adds, “being aggressively skeptical can help make lawyers successful advocates for their clients.”

“I often take the contrary position,” Lamber snickers. “In fact, I can convince myself of a position I don’t even believe in.”

Not psychologically damaged *at all*.

The parade of horrors

“The reality is that we’re in a line of work where we are often confronted by a ‘parade of horrors,’” laments Lamber. “A usual situation goes bad and we’re called in to help, often at the worst possible moments in the lives of our clients. In your personal life, this tends to also make you risk-averse, because you’ve seen firsthand what can happen when things go bad. So yes, ‘Why would I jump out of a perfectly good airplane?’”

At the end of the day, whether “crazy good,” or “crazy bad,” Lamber and Goodnow agree that most lawyers strive to be intelligent, compassionate, persuasive individuals, especially when fighting for the rights of their clients.

And because turnabout is most definitely fair play, all lawyers enjoy this lawyer joke: *The next time you’re in real trouble, try calling a comedian.* **AT**

MARC LAMBER and **JAMES GOODNOW** are shareholders at Fennemore Craig who handle plaintiff personal injury and wrongful death matters.

