

# The Stuff of a Full Life

BY MAY MON POST

**T**here's a magazine called *Success*, a fact unknown to me until my husband (we were just dating then) brought it to my attention several years ago. We had just attended a lovely holiday party at a glamorous suburban home of a well-to-do partner and his beautiful stay-at-home wife. My husband spent the first mile of our drive home complaining about the party. He was in a foul mood. His ire centered on *Success* magazine, which the hosts of the party had conspicuously left in the bathroom just beneath the custom-embroidered hand towels. Not even the warm afterglow of the hosts' generous martini could take the edge off of my husband's diatribe about really rich people showing off and lighting up their house like the world's fair.

But it *really* was a lovely house.

*Success*, the magazine, has a website. Its owner-editors boast that they will "provide a unique window into the lives, practices and philosophies of today's greatest achievers – top CEOs, revolutionary entrepreneurs and other extraordinary leaders." They proudly announce, "true personal success is not solely financial accumulation. Creating financial freedom and abundance for your family is an aspect of success, but not the whole story."

Phew. I was worried for a moment that financial accumulation/abundance was the whole story.

Whenever I think of success, I think of the process of achieving goals and generosity of spirit, whole dimensions of life that have less to do with money and what money can purchase than with the gifts of human connection and leaving time for family.

For example, my grandmother taught me the value of attaining goals and the idea that words matter. She was a farmer's daughter from the rural outskirts of a third-world country, and had barely graduated from the 10th grade. But she helped me with my homework every night. She came to all my school plays, and she encouraged me to read and write stories. For as long as I can remember, there has always been a stack of books by her reading chair. Now, well into her 90s, she uses a modified magnifying glass to read. My grandmother taught me that words matter, and they never grow old. She taught me to set goals and told me that I could become anything I set my mind to, even a lawyer.

My mother taught me to dig until you see the sun. In her garden, each and every spring, neat little rows of colorful flowers would appear. The rows were neat because my mother

planted them that way. In between the rows were troughs, and when it rained really hard, the sun and clouds often appeared in the water's reflection. My mother didn't like excuses. She told me that no one is born with innate gifts. You make yourself the best that you can be and achieve your goals only through enormous effort. My mother taught me that each garden is a reflection of the gardener's hard work and patience.

My stepfather taught me to listen and to reserve judgment. His favorite line in all of literature is sentence number two in *The Great Gatsby*, that magnificent novel about "success" by F. Scott Fitzgerald: "Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

And then, later in the novel, there is Jay Gatsby's own unheeded advice to steer clear of fool's gold: "Her voice is full of money." Funny, how I did not understand that line, nor the novel's larger themes, when I read the novel my first year in America, as an 11th-grader at a public high school in Bethesda, Md. Daisy Buchanan, the sole source of Jay Gatsby's love and affection, disappears (in the novel) and retreats into her vast wealth and snobbishness, always out of reach. Gloriously, readers get to grow up, evolve, and tune their hearts and minds to life's true riches.

My son, still a toddler, taught me – and continues to teach me – to persevere. Soon after the little guy learned to crawl, he was attempting to walk. No matter how many times he fell down, he never gave up. Now, he runs (mostly into things). I am exhausted just trying to keep up with him.

A teacher back in Burma, where I grew up – I've forgotten her name – taught me to try harder, to keep turning pages, to keep knocking nouns against verbs until a fire starts. She taught me to cherish the process of self-improvement. How much is that lesson, ingrained in the spirit forever, worth in financial accumulation?

All readers of this magazine surely have valuable lessons of their own to share. These lessons – idiosyncratic, yet strangely universal – often are not taught by top CEOs and financial wizards. Where I grew up, wizards carry staffs, not the *Financial Times*.

To paraphrase the words of T.S. Eliot, these are the fragments I have shored against my ruins. These are the lessons I want my son to learn, gradually, with help from family, friends and teachers. (Since he won't turn two until January, we are starting



## Where I grew up, wizards carry staffs, not the *Financial Times*.

with not making a huge mess during meals.)

So, what is success? It's the stuff of a full life. It is the stuff of a life that cannot be billed or taxed. It's about achieving your goals and appreciating the journey. It's about finding your happiness – whatever that may be. It's about human connections, and being present in the moment. It's about being the absolute best that you can be, both at your job and as a mother/father, a spouse/partner, or a son/daughter.

For the record: My husband and I occasionally light up our house like the world's fair and have catered parties. I suspect that more than one guest to our home has left, thinking that my husband and I were showing off.

Hope they enjoyed the martini. ■

*May Mon Post* ([mpost@dmvnlaw.com](mailto:mpost@dmvnlaw.com)), an associate with *Deasey, Mahoney, Valentini & North, Ltd.*, is Editor-in-Chief of *The Philadelphia Lawyer*.

### ATTORNEY DISCIPLINARY / ETHICS MATTERS

#### STATEWIDE PENNSYLVANIA MATTERS NO CHARGE FOR INITIAL CONSULTATION

Representation, consultation and expert testimony in disciplinary matters and matters involving ethical issues, bar admissions and the Rules of Professional Conduct

#### **James C. Schwartzman, Esq.**

- Former Chairman, Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
- Former Federal Prosecutor
- Former Chairman, Continuing Legal Education Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania
- Chair, Pennsylvania Interest on Lawyers Trust Account Board
- Selected by his peers as one of the top 100 Super Lawyers in Pennsylvania and the top 100 Super Lawyers in Philadelphia
- Named by his peers to *Best Lawyers in America* in the areas of ethics and professional responsibility and legal malpractice

1818 Market Street, 29th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19103

**(215) 751-2863**

The Philadelphia Lawyer USPS 025-241, printed with soy inks on recycled paper, is published quarterly in March, June, September and December by the Philadelphia Bar Association, 1101 Market St., 11th floor, Philadelphia, Pa. 19107-2955. Telephone: (215) 238-6300. E-mail: [tplmag@philabar.org](mailto:tplmag@philabar.org). Subscription cost for members is \$5 which is included in annual dues, and for nonmembers is \$45 yearly. The opinions stated herein are not necessarily those of the Philadelphia Bar Association. All manuscripts submitted will be carefully reviewed for possible publication. The editors reserve the right to edit all material for style and length. Advertising rates and information are available from Don Chalphin, Sales Director, ALM, 1617 JFK Boulevard, Suite 1750, Philadelphia, PA 19103, (215) 557-2359. Periodicals postage at Philadelphia and additional locations. POSTMASTER: please send changes to The Philadelphia Lawyer, c/o Philadelphia Bar Association, 1101 Market St., 11th floor, Philadelphia, PA 19107-2955

## The Philadelphia Lawyer

### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

May Mon Post

### Editorial Board

Niki T. Ingram  
Jennifer J. Snyder  
Steven R. Sher  
David I. Grunfeld  
Steve LaCheen  
Harold K. Cohen  
John C. Gregory  
Richard G. Freeman  
April M. Byrd  
Emmanuel O. Iheukwumere  
Michael J. Carroll  
James Backstrom  
Peter F. Vaira  
Deborah Weinstein  
M. Kelly Tillery  
Daniel J. Siegel  
Justine Gudenas

### Editor Emeritus

Herman C. Fala

### Senior Managing Editor

Jeff Lyons

### Design

Wesley Terry

## Philadelphia Bar Association

### CHANCELLOR

William P. Fedullo

### Chancellor-Elect

Albert S. Dandridge III

### Vice Chancellor

Gaetan J. Alfano

### Secretary

Jaqueline G. Segal

### Assistant Secretary

Judge A. Michael Snyder (ret.)

### Treasurer

Wesley R. Payne, IV

### Assistant Treasurer

Mary F. Platt

### Executive Director

Mark A. Tarasiewicz