

HEADNOTES



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The Year of Ophelia Camiña — DBA’s Trial Lawyer of the Year

BY TERRY BENTLEY HILL

Every day of **Ophelia Camiña’s** life prepared her for the last 12 months: a year of accomplishments—Dallas Bar Association’s Trial Lawyer of the Year. A year of sorrow and loss—the unexpected death of her beloved husband Jim Flegle in November. A year of health challenges—a cancer diagnosis three months after Jim’s death. And, a year of joy and celebration—twin children who despite grief, loss, and concern for their mother, forged ahead with their Ph.D. and medical school aspirations.

As a child growing up in San Antonio, the ethos in Ophelia’s home was the importance of education. Parents who were unable to finish high school recognized that education was the great equalizer and impressed upon Ophelia the need for hard work, discipline, and preparation. Not surprisingly, Ophelia won a scholarship to study theology and philosophy at Saint Mary’s College of Notre Dame, which explains her ability to assess a situation in a deep and thoughtful way, and wanted to go on to earn a Ph.D., but her hopes and dreams abruptly ended because the program did not offer scholarship monies. Admittedly, she was heartbroken. And that was the fork-in-the-road that changed her life and everyone else’s in the legal profession who crossed her path along the way.

Mind Candy

While at Notre Dame Law, where Ophelia attended on a full scholarship, something remarkable happened.

“I learned that the law was my true passion,” she said. “I loved the fact that as lawyers we operate in the grey areas. If the answer is black and white, then there’s not much of a disagreement, but in the grey areas, we get to be thoughtful and creative and craft answers to what the law should be or how the dispute should be decided. It’s like mind-candy and it is what still excites me about my career, even

after 40 years.”

The most enduring memory of Ophelia’s long career is her parents’ reaction when she graduated from law school. As Ophelia crossed the stage, her father cried tears of happiness. “It was the only time I ever saw my dad cry. He was the proudest a dad could be that day.”

Influencers

It was the most effective criminal defense attorney in all of history, Perry Mason, and a Notre Dame legal professor who influenced Ophelia’s law trajectory—litigation. According to Professor James Seckinger who taught Ophelia trial advocacy, “Ophelia stood out because she is small and kind of quiet, but when she does something, she is very, very effective. Those types sneak up on you, and then when they bite, boy, the bite is really effective.”



Ophelia Camiña

A wise mentor, Judge **Jerry Buchmeyer**, for whom Ophelia clerked, was ultimately responsible for her becoming a trial lawyer. “He had been a trial lawyer and was a very progressive thinker. Even though at the time there were not many female trial lawyers in Dallas, he was very supportive of me pursuing that path.”

Ophelia’s legal journey was not easy; she encountered obstacles along the way. “The first and biggest obstacle I faced was being a woman.”

In 1982, female trial lawyers in Dallas were few and far between, so there were not many role models for Ophelia. “Chauvinism in the courtroom and in the profession was not uncommon, unfortunately. I just wish I had a nickel for every time I was called ‘little lady’ or when someone cracked a joke about why women shouldn’t be in the courtroom.”

The way she dealt with the patriarchal culture was by ignoring them. “I worked hard and was determined to prove them wrong.” Fortunately, Ophelia landed at the firm of Susman Godfrey where she worked for **Steve Susman, Bill**

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Frank E. Stevenson II to receive DBF Fellows Justinian Award

BY CHUCK SNAKARD

There is no known tape of Frank’s debut as a country-western disc jockey, but his performance, a last-minute desperation pinch-hit when the regularly scheduled DJ failed to show up at KJIM “Redneck Radio,” so impressed the station manager that he offered Frank a permanent job on the spot. Frank was a summer employee and he responded that he needed to return to college to complete his undergraduate studies. “Frank,” the somber manager said, “college isn’t for everyone.”

Frank grew up in Fort Worth, a high school classmate of a previous Fellows Justinian Award recipient **Tom Leatherbury** (commercial radio experience yet to be disclosed.) He did go on to finish college—the good



Frank E. Stevenson II

race was not to be run in a broadcast booth—and graduated magna cum laude from Amherst College and received a law degree from the University of Virginia Law School. He joined Locke, Purnell, Boren, Laney & Neely (now Locke Lord) in 1980, bringing not only the wit and adaptability that nearly brought him fame as a disc jockey, but also the ability to relate to clients and their needs, to analyze their problems and find solutions. Frank was nominally a member of the real estate section, but his practice extended to administrative and regulatory matters, public law, and policy and transportation. He drafted significant legislation and regulations and testified before, and worked with, legislative bodies in Austin and Washington, D.C.

Paul Wageman, former chairman of the North Texas Tollway Authority, an organization Frank represented throughout his career, wrote, “I worked closely with Frank during a period of profound challenge and transformation for the agency. Frank’s creativity,

steadiness, work ethic, and character were indispensable to achieving the NTTA’s objectives. His devotion to his clients and fulfilling their goals is remarkable. It is fitting that the Dallas Bar Foundation bestow on him its highest award.”

A list of Frank’s accomplishments is humbling to read and include being listed as one of The Best Lawyers in America; a Top-Rated Lawyer AV Preeminent, Banking and Finance Law and Transportation Law by *American Lawyer* and Martindale-Hubbell; and one of the Best Lawyers in Dallas by *D Magazine*. The Dallas Bar Association (DBA) awarded him the Morris Harrell Professionalism Award.

He served as President of the State Bar of Texas, President of the DBA, and President of the Western States Bar Conference. He is a fellow, and formerly Chair, of the Dallas Bar Foundation and is a life fellow of the Texas Bar Foundation and the American Bar Association. He is a former Chair of the State Bar Board of Directors. He is on the Board of the College of the State Bar of Texas and a member of the Texas Center for Legal Ethics. He received the DBA’s JoAnna Moreland Outstanding Committee Chair Award.

Additionally, he was a Member of the American Bar Association House of Delegates; a Member of the ABA Standing Committee on the Delivery of Legal Services; a member of the State Bar of Texas Pro Bono Work Group; the President of the DBA’s Community Service Fund; a member of the Commission to Expand Civil Legal Services (appointed by Texas Supreme Court); a member of the DBA Committee to Finalize Statement on Minority Hiring, Retention, and Advancement; the Chair of the Campaign for Equal

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JOIN NOW & SAVE!

Newly joining members that join the DBA during the month of September will save over 30% on Dues, receiving up to 16 months of membership for the price of 12 months. Membership will be valid through December 31, 2024. Questions? Contact membership@dallasbar.org.

This special is available to NEW MEMBERS of the DBA (never joined before) or former DBA members that have not paid dues since 2021.

Tips, Tools, and Strategies for Legal Professionals

BY HANNAH BRUNO

Working long, solitary hours is often viewed as part and parcel of being in the legal profession. However, professionals are increasingly reporting high rates of exhaustion and burnout. Increasing productivity and efficiency in how you spend your time as a legal professional is important for several reasons, including generating cost savings, creating a competitive advantage, increasing job satisfaction, and preventing burnout.

Legal Productivity Hacks

Refer to these tips to increase productivity, manage workload effectively, and provide high-quality service to clients.

- 1. Use technology to automate repetitive tasks:** Save time by automating menial tasks such as document drafting, scheduling, and billing using software tools specifically designed for legal work.
- 2. Create a to-do list and prioritize tasks:** Focus on the most important tasks by jotting down a list of to-dos with proper prioritization.
- 3. Set realistic deadlines:** This can better manage your workload and help you avoid feeling overwhelmed by tight deadlines.
- 4. Avoid multitasking:** Multitasking can actually decrease productivity. Focus on completing one task at a time.
- 5. Delegate tasks to support staff:** Allow support staff to take on busywork and free up your time to focus on higher-level items.
- 6. Take breaks and practice self-care:** Taking regular breaks and engaging in self-

care activities, such as exercise or meditation, can help you recharge, stay focused, and prevent burnout.

7. Use templates and checklists: Utilizing templates and checklists can ensure that routine tasks are done quickly and efficiently, and that nothing falls through the cracks.

8. Learn to say “no” to low-value work: When you say “no” to work that does not align with your expertise or is not a good use of time, you are better able to focus on meaningful work that enables your firm to thrive.

How Do Law Firms Measure Productivity?

Measuring productivity in a law firm can be challenging because of the complexity of legal work. There are often many variables that affect the outcome of a particular matter. However, here are some simple metrics that any law firm can track to measure productivity:

- Billable hours
- Time management
- Case outcomes
- Client satisfaction
- Non-billable work

By measuring these metrics, law firms can identify areas where they may improve efficiency, reduce costs, and provide better service to their clients.

3 Tools That Help Lawyers Increase Productivity

Reputable law firms implement

modern tools to streamline daily operations, making it essential to explore the best options available to save time and effort.

1. Time-tracking software. Time-tracking software enables better time management. It makes it simple to accurately track the time dedicated to different tasks, providing visibility into how time is being spent and allowing you to identify areas where you can improve efficiency.

2. Invoicing software. Legal work requires tracking billable hours and expenses and preparing detailed client invoices. This process can be time-consuming and prone to errors, impacting productivity and profitability. Invoicing software can automate this process, enabling you to generate invoices quickly and accurately, save valuable time, and increase cash flow.

3. Online payment acceptance. By accepting online payments, legal professionals can reduce the time and resources spent on billing and collecting payments. This frees up time for other essential tasks. Additionally, online payment acceptance can help legal professionals manage their cash flow more efficiently by providing real-time payment processing and notifications.

A Step-by-Step Guide to Billing Like a Pro

Reference this checklist to bring

your billing process up to the gold standard:

- Use time-tracking software or tools to accurately track your work hours.
- Record your time daily or at regular intervals to avoid forgetting important details.
- Communicate clearly about your billing process, including rates, payment terms, and payment methods.
- Create detailed invoices outlining the work performed, hours billed, and any expenses incurred.
- Invoice clients promptly and regularly, preferably on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.
- Include a due date on your invoices and send reminders to clients about upcoming payments.
- Keep detailed records of all client invoices and payments, and reconcile your records with your bank statements frequently.
- Review your billing and invoicing process regularly to identify areas for improvement.
- Be transparent and responsive to client questions or concerns about billing.

From optimizing time tracking to utilizing automation software, there are numerous ways to increase productivity in the legal profession. With the tips above, dedication, and practice, you can accomplish more tasks and provide better service to your clients. **HN**

Hannah Bruno is a Senior Content Writer at LawPay.

The Year of Ophelia Camiña — DBA’s Trial Lawyer of the Year

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White, Terry Oxford, and Barry Barnett who were married to female lawyers. “So, within the firm I didn’t find it difficult because I was treated equally.” The other obstacle Ophelia faced was having a family. “There are a lot of responsibilities that come with having a family, and unfortunately society hasn’t entirely caught up with the notion that mothers can be working professionals,” said Ophelia. “It was hard and it tested my resolve in ways like nothing else has. But it was absolutely worth it. My kids (Alexandra and James Flegle) mean the world to me and are my most important legacy; so, I can’t imagine a world without them.”

“I Got Lucky”

Ophelia’s first break was getting trial experience early on and training under Steve Susman. “Steve was a legendary lawyer and because of that training and experience, I earned the gravitas to be considered a first-chair trial lawyer.”

Her second break involved timing. “My maturity as a trial lawyer coincided with an increase in women taking the bench. More and more juries were composed primarily of women. Clients started to realize the value of having a female lawyer and that helped me and other female lawyers get roles of responsibility on trial teams.” She adds that women have more opportunity to be creative in the courtroom because juries don’t expect or want women to conform to the stereotype of the brash, overbearing trial lawyer.

“Steve taught us that trial is really theater. We have to think about the ultimate audience. You can never lose sight of who it is you are trying to persuade.”

Winning Formula

Ophelia has handled hundreds of cases and crafted a winning formula that

vaulted her into the esteemed ranks of the very best plaintiff trial lawyers in the country. A partner at Susman since 1991, Ophelia knows that preparation and organized efficiency are essential to winning, whether in or out of the courtroom.

Her formula to being a successful trial lawyer is not what most people think. It is important knowing trial techniques, she says, “But what they don’t often teach you, and is more important than those techniques, is building trust. Building trust with the judge and the jury. I try to build that trust by showing over and over again that I am honest, candid, and that I follow through on my word. I am a big believer in etiquette in the courtroom, treating witnesses, staff, and opposing counsel with respect, and never, ever overselling in opening what I think I can prove.”

Life Happens While Practicing Law

Life never stops, not even in the middle of a three-week trial. If you want to enrich your life, ask Ophelia to tell you about losing her beloved father during a trial with millions of dollars on the line. Armando Camiña, a decorated WWII veteran, was Ophelia’s first role model. He taught her humility, that a conflict did not have to be discourteous, and that you can have courage and confidence, but you do not have to beat up on people. While Ophelia was in trial, Armando suffered an aneurism and she rushed to San Antonio to be at his side. Daughter and father shared his last moments, and the war hero was buried the day after Memorial Day. Ophelia returned to trial and was slated for the closing argument rebuttal, which was only days following her father’s death.

She represented a plaintiff in a commercial fraud case and the jury had seen a lot of damning evidence of lies, deception, and greed. When her turn came to

close, she stood in front of the jury and looked them directly in the eyes.

“I reminded them about the evidence they had seen; I also talked to them about our common values—things like honesty, integrity, and fairness. These are values that my dad taught me. As I was talking, I got this warm, but eerie feeling that my dad was standing there with me. I choked up a bit, but somehow knowing that he was there to support me gave me the strength to go on. So, I swallowed hard, found my composure, and continued to speak from the heart. I asked the jury to award my client \$170 million dollars to ‘right this wrong.’” The jury awarded Ophelia’s client \$240 million dollars instead.

Accolades and Legacy

The list of awards bestowed upon Ophelia is long. The Dallas Bar Association (DBA) named her a Living Legend, Trial Lawyer of the Year, and an Inspiring Woman. She was named one of the Lawdragon 500 Leading Financial Lawyers and secured some of the largest jury verdicts in the country, leading to her induction into the Texas Verdicts Hall of Fame for winning the eighth-largest jury verdict in the U.S. in 2010.

Generously, Ophelia shares her wealth of knowledge, experience, and training with others. “Mentoring is a responsibility; an investment in the future,” she said. “I make it a point to bring young lawyers to trial with me. I always give them witnesses and speaking parts.” She also teaches young lawyers how to prepare for trial. Direct and cross are written out and are practiced over and over. “I try to teach them about judgment in the courtroom. When do you fight over something and when do you not?”

In 2018, the DBA recognized her work with the DBA WE LEAD program with its Presidential Citation. WE

LEAD is a full-year curriculum designed to educate, promote, retain, and network young women lawyers. The program was born out of frustration over the exodus of female lawyers when they got to 7-10 years out of law school. “I, along with Michael Hurst and Shonn Brown, designed a curriculum to address the issues that drive women out of the profession and to give these women the tools they need to stay in the profession.”

In 2010, her passion inspired her to create a networking group for women lawyers called Act III, to recognize the importance of supporting women in the third act of their career. She is also credited for the dramatic increase in women partners in her firm by implementing various programs to support and promote women lawyers as the inaugural chair of the Diversity Committee.

“The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places.” —Ernest Hemingway

The last 12 months have been challenging for Ophelia. “Dealing with illness and death has been incredibly challenging for me,” she said. “Events like these really make you focus on those touch questions: What is the meaning of my life? What is the legacy I leave? Did I make a positive difference, and if so, how? What else can I do?”

“I am still working through the answers to these and other questions, but I can tell you that while it is scary to contemplate these questions, there is also a silver lining. I get to think about these questions, and reflect on my life, and use my time to improve upon the answers!”

Just like Hemingway said, some are strong in the broken places. That is Ophelia Camiña, our Trial Lawyer of the Year. Congratulations! **HN**

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