



By Adam Gersh

*YOUNG LAWYER CHAIRMAN'S NOTE: I am pleased to present the first in a series of articles on the theme of "what I wish I knew when I was a young lawyer." If you would like to find other ways to enrich your professional life, please join us for our next Young Lawyers' Committee meeting on September 1, 2009 at Bar Headquarters.*

## Young Lawyer Corner

### "Did I Make the Right Choice?"

By Steve Greenberg, Flaster/Greenberg P.C.

When Adam Gersh asked me to consider writing an article for the Young Lawyer's column in the Barrister on what I wish I knew when I was a young lawyer, at first I thought of the usual pieces of advice, such as always return phone calls the day they are received, always record your time currently and like clichés. None of this was very profound and hardly justified taking up space in our Association's monthly newsletter, let alone taking people's time to read it.

Then I recalled an experience that had a tremendous impact on me and thought it was worth sharing. It is in keeping with the theme of I wish I knew then. . .

I was extremely fortunate to have attended Yale Law School, shortly after, or at the same time as, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Clarence Thomas and Sam Alito, and before Sonia Sotomayor. That credential provided a key that unlocked a practically unlimited set of doors, from high level government service, to the best judicial clerkships (including the state and federal Supreme Courts), to the most prestigious law firms in the country, some of which had offices throughout the world and promised not only extraordinary compensation but a chance to live in a foreign country for a time before returning to the United States and settling down. It was a very exciting time.

Despite these opportunities, I won the award in my class for going to work for the smallest, most unusual law firm. My family roots were in South Jersey and during the summer between my second and third year of law school, I worked for one of the mega firms in Philadelphia ("mega" at that time meaning approximately 125 lawyers). Through an amazing happenstance, I had the good fortune that summer to meet Rick Flaster, then a 32 year old Harvard Law School alumnus, who had recently left a prestigious Wall Street firm to join Manny Liebman in Cherry Hill and form the two person tax boutique, Liebman & Flaster. His wife's family had been from Camden and he felt that South Jersey was a place with untapped potential to build a sophisticated law practice in a suburban setting. I was immensely impressed by Rick's talent and creativity, and when I received an offer to join the firm following my graduation, I felt that this was an opportunity to have a mentor in the true sense of the word and help build something from the ground up. I rejected a lucrative offer from the mega firm and chose to become the third lawyer in a three lawyer tax practice in Cherry Hill. Meanwhile, I watched my classmates go off to New York, Washington, San Francisco, London and Paris.

My career progressed the way I had hoped it would. I worked at Rick Flaster's elbow, learning not only substantive tax and corporate law, but the practicalities of how to

be a lawyer and a counselor to clients. I learned about the business of the profession as we grew our firm. I had the opportunity to make a difference in the lives and businesses of our clients. I became entrenched in the community. And I never worked more than fifteen minutes from home, affording me the opportunity to see my daughters grow up and participate in their lives and activities. What more could I want?

Still, I always had this nagging feeling that Yale had given me a key that unlocked so many professional doors, and I never used it. I wondered what it would have been like to serve as tax legislative counsel to a prominent senator, work in London on international transactions, help create new investment vehicles, maybe even be instrumental in making policy on a national level. I watched my classmates' accomplishments from a distance and always thought about whether I had made the right career decision to come to a small firm in South Jersey.

I attended my 20th law school reunion in New Haven and on the drive there, found these doubts dominating my thoughts. I hoped that I would not be intimidated by my classmates and their accomplishments. I knew that the firm I had joined after law school had grown to about 20 lawyers and that I had established a pretty successful tax and corporate practice, but after all, it was in South Jersey, not the financial capitals of the world. Surely my career paled in comparison to my classmates'.

When waiting at our hotel for a ride to our class dinner, I struck up a conversation with a classmate with whom I had been marginally friendly during law school. Not surprisingly, he was a partner in the Washington, D.C. office of an internationally renowned firm, working regularly on international deals. He told me he routinely spent two to three weeks a month in European capitals, structuring multinational business transactions. I was green with envy. Nothing I had done came even close.

When I told my classmate how exciting his career sounded, to my complete surprise, I heard, "It sucks. The travel is exhausting, the time demands are impossible, I am divorced, I hardly know my kids and each deal looks just like the last one. I wish I had a practice like yours."

That was an epiphany. From that moment on, I never once doubted that I had made the right career choice. If only I had known that earlier, I would never have had the nagging doubts.

The practice of law has many faces and touches many lives. You can make a difference in the world around you whether you practice on an international playing field or in your own backyard. Don't think that the grass is greener elsewhere. It isn't.