Giving Thanks

The holiday season is upon us and with it comes the time we should be giving thanks for the good things in our lives. At times, due to factors that are both beyond and within our control, the simple art of giving thanks can be somewhat difficult.

As I write this, we are just starting the third week of the federal government partial shutdown and are three days away from reaching the nation’s debt limit. We are frustrated by the impact the continuing crisis has on our fellow citizens and our own peace of mind. The entire Washington, D.C., fiasco of “government by crisis” has more than worn thin at this point as we consider the impact on our lives of the continuing political gamesmanship. As attorneys, we are used to resolving our client’s disputes one way or another, but we are accustomed to getting a resolution. As a mediator, I cringe when I watch the endless TV coverage of our elected officials bating each other with incendiary statements that sabotage the efforts of those who think more rationally and are still trying to work for the common good. In a recent Wall Street Journal poll, 60 percent of those polled wanted to throw everyone in Washington out of office. Count me in.

Here in Kansas, as we head toward the upcoming legislative session, the future appears uncertain on issues of importance to our profession. Matters of court funding, court efficiency and flexibility, e-filing, selection of the Kansas Supreme Court, separation of powers between the judicial and legislative branches, etc., are all looming large as 2014 approaches. In our own practices and personal lives, there are always those matters that need more time, attention, and care than we are able to give them, causing further stress.

In light of all of these factors, it would be totally reasonable to simply throw up our hands and announce that there is not a lot to be thankful for in the holiday season of 2013. However, to do that would be a grave disservice to all of the good things that are present in our professional and personal lives. These are the things that we often forget and/or take for granted. These are the things that we, frankly, need to think about more often.

Here are the things that I am thankful for as we bring an end to 2013:

Professionally

I am thankful for having clients who allow me to serve them. Without clients, none of us would be able to do what we have worked so hard to be in a position to do, which is assist clients with their legal needs. For me this year, having clients who have patience with my frequent absence due to association duties is especially appreciated.

We are blessed to have a hard working and diligent judicial branch, whose justices, appellate, district, and magistrate judges and employees have been working under short-staffed and difficult conditions for some time. They have had no raises and no real legislative consideration of improvements to judicial branch operations that have been identified after thoughtful consideration by independent commissions. Despite those difficulties, the work of the court system continues to get done to a degree that recognizes that the courts of Kansas as being among the highest rated court systems in the nation.

We have, overall, a group of thousands of Kansas lawyers and support staff that not only competently address the needs of clients, but also donate tens of thousands of hours annually of pro bono, civic, association, charitable, and educational work that benefit all of Kansas on a local, regional, and statewide basis. Everywhere I go, I continue to be impressed at the stories of Kansas lawyers making a real difference in the lives of fellow Kansans just because they care.

We have a hard working staff at the KBA, who are actively engaged in helping reinvent the KBA and are constantly looking at ways to improve the KBA member experience and service to our members. Those efforts involve being willing to listen to constructive criticism and be always looking for ways to do things better as the association moves forward. Our membership continues to assist in this process and offer relevant, thoughtful input.

We have a dedicated board at the KBA whose members do not hesitate to offer thoughtful input to the discussion of the issues that we face. One of my favorite quotes is that of General George Patton, who said “If everyone is thinking the same thing, then someone isn’t thinking at all.” At the KBA Board of Governor’s meetings, there is a lot of thinking going on. However, at the end of the day, the Board is able to move forward and deal with the issues at hand after all viewpoints have been considered and discussed.

Personally

I am thankful for a supportive family who puts up with my desire to serve in the KBA and the Kansas Association of School Boards, and the time away from home and office that results from this service. This extends to my office family as well, as they pick up the resulting slack that occurs in my absence.

I am thankful for the opportunity to work with other attorneys and their staff, the judges in front of whom I practice, and the court personnel that I deal with daily. For the past 30 years Southeast Kansas has been and continues to be a great place to practice law.

I am thankful for the group of friends, both personal and professional, that keeps me grounded and on track in my pursuits. Whenever I start letting the ego get a little too large, a simple reminder that it is time to go work on the Lions Club Shelter House roof or that “Topeka can wait” or “you really goofed on that one” brings me back into focus very rapidly.
I am thankful that I live in small town southeast Kansas because in this community we all have each other’s back. When our home burned a few years ago, the outpouring of immediate concern and support was beyond comprehension. Even people we didn't know were there asking how they could help. It was more than humbling to be in a position of needing help from others and then be overwhelmed by what was offered.

Finally, I am thankful for the opportunity to serve the KBA and KASB. As a result of these opportunities, I have expanded my horizons and had the chance to meet and work with leaders in the legal and educational communities all over Kansas and across the nation. I try to act like a sponge around these people, because they have so much to share both professionally and personally and they are more than willing to do so.

So, there you have it. Despite all of the bad news that continually bombards us and elevates our stress level, all it takes is a few moments of reflection to realize that there is a lot to be thankful for this holiday season. When you are having a bad day, take just a few moments to think about all the good things in your professional and personal life. Then take the next step and recognize those around you and thank them for being part of your personal “good news.”

On both a personal and professional level, please accept my best wishes for a wonderful holiday season and a happy and successful new year!

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A message from your KBA Awards Committee Chair, Sara Beezley

Begin thinking about those champions in the legal profession who ought to be recognized and commended for their steadfast efforts.

Please stay tuned as the KBA Awards Nomination form will be printed in the January and February Journals.

We eagerly await and encourage numerous submissions for our 2014 award selection process.

Sincerely,

Sara Beezley