

# Mark Twain's advice to new lawyers

BY WADE H. ABED II

I do not feel qualified to give advice to new lawyers. But I do think Samuel Langhorne Clemens, aka Mark Twain, is qualified to give advice to new lawyers. Here is some of his best, with a bit of lawyer-specific elaboration from me.

**1** "A man cannot be comfortable without his own approval."

You do you, let them do them. Be comfortable with yourself. The closer you can get to being your authentic self early in your legal career, the happier you will be day to day. I remember asking my wife whether I would be the only lawyer pulling up to work in Mankato playing A Tribe Called Quest's seminal album, *The Low End Theory*. My wife Kellie said, "Who cares?" Kellie was right.

**2** "Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."

Don't make up limitations. The limitations will present themselves without your help. There is no reason to engage in self-defeating limitations that don't exist.

**3** "Humor is mankind's greatest blessing."

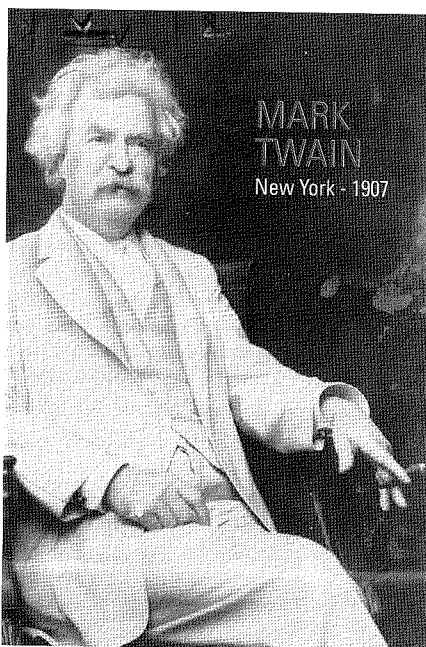
It is okay to have fun at a law firm. Try not to have the fun around anti-fun people at the office, though, especially if they sign your check. My first boss told me it was imperative to have fun while practicing law because it can be kind of a drag. He dealt with some heavy stuff in his distressed business practice and still had fun with it. Many of his clients were losing their businesses. I think his attitude made it easier for them.

**4** "Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured."

Don't hold onto anger. Set it down and don't pick it back up. This is hard to do. Lawyers are taught to remember details and history. Forget anger. It will bring you down, sour your spirit, and gut your energy.

**5** "Don't go around saying the world owes you a living. The world owes you nothing. It was here first."

No one owes you. The world may not give you what you want. Surprise! This is liberating too. The partners don't owe you. The clients don't owe you. You owe you. Shape your own practice. Since becoming a partner and founding my own law firm I discovered we can go pretty much wherever we want.



**6** "A person with a new idea is a crank until the idea succeeds."

If you walk your own path, it may get lonely. If you start changing your practice, change lawyer jobs, or do something different from your normal *modus operandi*, then people may react in different ways. Some may encourage. Some may hate. Some may sabotage. Don't let it hold you back. This probably would have been a great spot for a Steve Jobs reference, but I just couldn't do it.

**7** "Drag your thoughts away from your troubles... by the ears, by the heels, or any other way you can manage it."

Focus on what you want. Your focus will determine your success or failure. I take this to mean that you can worry or prepare. This takes practice. Lawyers are taught to find problems or think up problems to prevent. Get away from the negative thought habit. Don't worry. Prepare.

**8** "The best way to cheer yourself up is to try to cheer somebody else up."

Cheer up others. Be the oasis. There is plenty of desert to go around in the Sahara of many law firms. Positive people in the workplace are like an oasis in a desolate culture. Invest in your relationships at work. Smile at people. If you help someone, then both of you can feel good. Don't focus on what else you could have been doing while you were helping them. Keep in mind, the colleague you helped feels inclined to help you later. Humans naturally get the idea of reciprocity.

**9** "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover."

Finish talking, then starting doing. The main character in *The Shawshank Redemption* movie, Andy Dufresne, says, "Get busy living, or get busy dying." If you want to do something, then get started. Don't let anyone, any job, partner, or fear stop your action. Surround yourself with people who constantly refill your cup and encourage the hope that fosters motivation. ▲

*About the author: Wade H. Abed II is a lawyer at the Knutson, Casey, Koberoski+Abel Law Firm, in Mankato, Minnesota. Wade and his wife, Kellie, have two sons (Miles and Lincoln) and one dog (Lovie). Wade primarily practices in the areas of businesses, real estate, estates, and vaccines.*

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