

# Serving with Soul



**WSBA President  
Steven G. Toole**

I'm coming into the home stretch of a journey that began 17 years ago. It was 1993, when I was sworn in as the WSBA governor for the 8th congressional district. I served my three years on the Board of Governors from 1993 through 1996 and then, after a few years' absence, began attending BOG meetings as a liaison and continued to do so until last year. At that time, I was elected president-elect of the WSBA and served in that capacity this past year. Having just been sworn in as president of the Washington State Bar Association, I'm ready to summit at last.

I have learned much in my 62 years and particularly in these last 17. When I started on the BOG, there were 11 governors and no year-long president-elect position. The Access to Justice Board had just been created and in my first year on the BOG, we also added the BOG Diversity Committee, which I chaired. It seems quaint in retrospect, but our idea of diversity on the BOG back then was striving to have two or three women governors. There were discussions about increasing the size of the BOG by adding a Washington Young Lawyers Division (WYLD) seat and a diversity seat. These suggestions were rejected, largely by governors insisting that each governor had to have a constituency defined by a legislative district or, in the case of King County, by a county, not by an "affiliation group."

By 2000, the discussion about adding diversity and WYLD seats was rekindled, and this time, those arguments prevailed. Thus we now have 14 governors on the WSBA

Board of Governors, with one at-large seat being reserved for a WYLD representative and two at-large seats being reserved for members who are from constituencies of the Bar that are traditionally under-represented. Generally, this has come to be thought of as two diversity seats.

I was a liaison to the BOG when the WYLD and diversity seats were first created. It came at a time when several governors had left the Board early to become president-elect. Thus, we had 14 governors and, for a couple years or so, about half of them were new to the BOG and inexperienced with regard to the workings of the

the intended blend of experience that by design comes with renewing one-third of the Board every year. Our 14 energetic and dedicated governors all bring a lot to the table and are committed to the business of working hard and making tough policy decisions for the WSBA. This is the Board that I will have the privilege of presiding over during the 2010–2011 fiscal year. It is an honor without parallel, and I will work tirelessly over the next 12 months to justify the trust which has been placed in me.

I have been told that I can use this column to write on virtually anything I want. Specifically, I was told, "Your column can

be on any topic — a presidential theme, current legal issues, personal stories, interactions with WSBA members, BOG news, interviews with interesting people — the possibilities are endless." I appreciate that in any given month, circumstances may develop that dictate the topic for my column. Now, it is my intention to share my journey with you and, in the course of doing so, hopefully impart some of the lessons I am learning.

Experience has taught me that there are basically two kinds of people in this world — Givers and Takers. Perhaps this is a bit simplistic, but in general I find it to be true. In my world, Givers are those people who think of others first, last, and always. A Giver appreciates what he or she has and is willing to share it

with others. Givers come from their soul whenever they act. Givers not only "talk the talk," but they "walk the walk." We may not know why we are attracted to Givers, but we are. They have positive energy others like to be around. We absorb their positive

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Board and the Association. As a result, the more senior leadership on the Board was missing. However, things have now settled down. With two exceptions over the last seven years, the governors have all completed their three-year term and we have

energy and feel better about ourselves. We are inspired by Givers to think of others first and do good deeds.

We are all aware of many such Givers in history. Well-known examples include Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. We all know many other Givers in our own lives, though their impact may not be quite so global. Nevertheless, they are no less Givers, and I personally hold them in high esteem and strive to emulate their actions.

Takers, on the other hand, are those people who do not automatically think of other people first. They are focused on their own lives and self-absorbed with their own problems and their own daily and long-term stresses and difficulties. As they focus inwardly, they don't exude that positive energy so natural to the Giver. They attract people with their sheer will of power and expect that things will be done for them. Any value judgments to be drawn from this dichotomy would be shallow and half-accurate. The truth is that most of us are both Takers and Givers. The challenge is to maximize those times when we are a Giver and learn from those occasions when we slip into being a Taker.

Probably we can agree that the three historical figures I mentioned were outstanding


examples of being a Giver. I also mentioned that we all personally know people who are Givers. One such local person with whom I know you are all familiar is the immediate past-president of the Washington State Bar Association, Salvador Mungia. I doubt that Sal thinks of himself as a Giver. That is what's ironic about true Givers; they don't see it in themselves. They don't make conscious decisions on a daily basis as to "should I be a Giver today or am I going to be a Taker?" They just live their lives focused on those around them and always strive to be in service and assist in whatever way they can. To Givers, *being in service* to others is not an act of kindness or thoughtfulness... it is a state of being. It is so ingrained in these people that it becomes part of their essence or soul. We saw this repeatedly in Sal during his year as president. He made himself available to anyone who asked, any time they asked. He sacrificed his law practice and his personal family time to be in service to this Association, its members, and the public. He, like Givers generally, is inspiring without necessarily realizing it. He "walks the walk."

I am fortunate to have another Giver in my life —my wife, Christie. She routinely thinks of others first and will alter her own plans and wishes to help a friend in trouble. Whether it be middle-of-the-night emer-

gency counseling or support for a friend in need, shopping and running errands for another friend who temporarily can't drive, or cooking and delivering meals to a shelter for homeless teenagers, Christie is there... no questions asked.

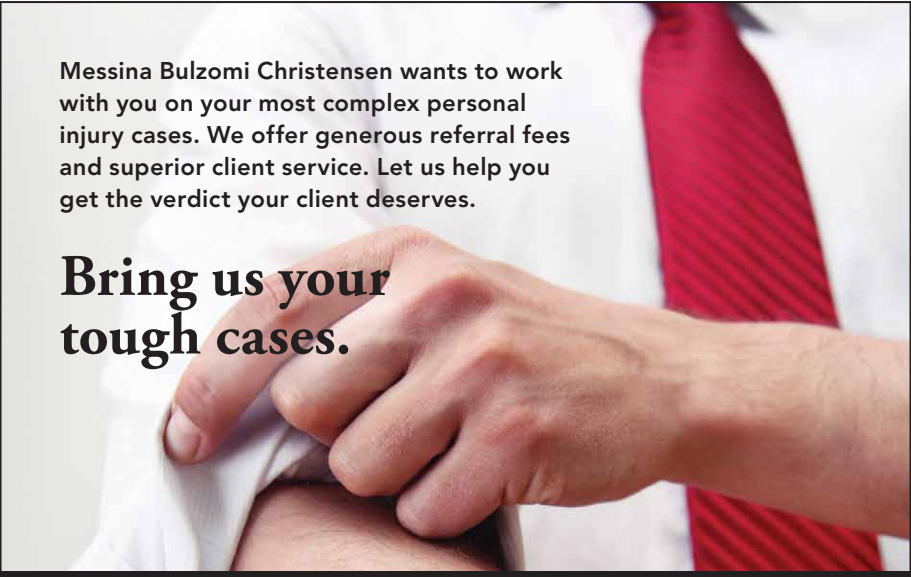
I consider myself so fortunate to have people like Sal and Christie in my life. They serve as a constant reminder to me of how important it is to not only *be in service* to others, but to make that willingness to give come from my soul and not just be an occasional act of kindness. Living a life *in service* to others is the only way that we can really have an impact in this world. We may never have the global impact of a Mother Teresa, Gandhi, or Dr. King, but we can have a local impact. This doesn't mean that we have to give up our practices and ignore our families so that we can devote our lives to serving others. We can be Givers within the context of our existing lives and businesses.

The WSBA Board of Governors has recently been having discussions about developing a "culture of service" throughout our Association and among our members. WSBA Executive Director Paula Littlewood made this the focus of her "Executive's Report" in the August 2010 edition of *Bar News*. You will hear more about this as the year progresses. For now, just appreciate that each of us can impact our bar association, the legal community, our individual communities, and our neighbors, friends, co-workers, and families. It's never too late to emphasize giving in our lives. Start with your immediate family, the people in your office, and your colleagues. Say "yes" when someone asks you for help, and drop what you are doing to help them, rather than making them wait for when it is most convenient for you. Participate in a volunteer legal clinic in your community. Take on a pro bono case. Contribute one hour's fee to LAW Fund. Mentor a young lawyer. Serve on a Bar committee. Help serve a meal at a homeless shelter. The ways in which you can serve are endless.

Learn from Sal and my wife, like I am. Think of others first and come from your heart. Start with a kind act and work toward developing a culture of service ... one in which giving becomes second nature to you. Not only will you benefit those around you, you will feel good about yourself. This is what I call *Serving with Soul*. 

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