



Angelo Paparelli “Attorney, know thyself”

[by Teresa Talerico]

A respected corporate immigration lawyer, Angelo Paparelli is passionate about his work. But in his early days as an attorney, he had briefly considered leaving the profession. Finding his calling in immigration law made all the difference. Paparelli urges young lawyers to do some real soul-searching to discover their strengths and passions.

“The law is such a widely encompassing field that people—if they think of themselves as only being lawyers, or only certain kinds of lawyers—may not really allow themselves to brainstorm and see what other opportunities law presents,” he said.

A 1976 graduate of Wayne State University Law School, he is managing partner of Paparelli & Partners in Irvine, CA.

Q: What can law students do to prepare for careers in immigration law?

A: One thing they can do is to sign up for a newsletter. There’s a weekly newsletter and daily newsletter on www.ilw.com. That would give them a daily awareness of some of the issues. Another newsletter—I’m not real supportive of their goals, which is pretty much anti-immigration, but nevertheless covers a lot of information on the subject, which can be controversial—is available at the Center for Immigration Studies. There’s also the possibility that a law student could join as a student member of the American Immigration Lawyers’ Association.

The next thing they can do is take whatever immigration courses are offered at their law school. Increasingly, those courses are available in lecture or clinic format or small group seminar, where they’re writing a research paper. They could apply to be an intern or a summer clerk at an immigration law firm, although frankly, we are looking increasingly for someone with some level of experience.

Q: What should law schools teach that they

currently don’t?

A: Unfortunately, most of the law school classes are survey classes. And they do not have intense instruction or advanced instruction in corporate immigration or employment-based immigration. The survey classes will go to the Constitutional law underpinnings of immigration law and the long history of our up-and-down swings in how we enforce the immigration laws in the United States. It’s all very interesting and all very useful. But in the real world of getting a job in an immigration law firm, you need to have knowledge of the bread-and-butter employment-based or corporate immigration law.

Q: Can you discuss the rewards and challenges of immigration law?

A: There is a great measure of satisfaction in the practice of immigration law. The cases often have a comparatively short lifespan in the sense that the non-immigrant or work visa cases can be over in a couple of months. You are constantly reinforced with success because the success is well defined: it is the visa stamp or the work permit or the green card. You know you won. Unlike litigation or transactional matters, where there is a winner or loser, everyone essentially wins because this is the American dream and we empower people to pursue it. In that sense, it’s very rewarding.

On the negative side, it can be stressful. Oftentimes, you’re dealing with a faceless bureaucracy that has unpublished rules, that changes its mind on a frequent basis

and leaves you in the lurch when you rely on their earlier version of what they thought the proper law and procedural interpretations should be.

I would urge any law student considering this field to decide that they’re lawyers first and not immigration practitioners first. An immigration practitioner sometimes gets the mindset of just a paper shuffler—move the paper, move the paper, move the paper.

Q: Who inspired you to go into law?

A: It was not any one person, but it was the practice of reading biographies and autobiographies. When I was graduating, it was the height of the Vietnam era; and it wasn’t certain whether or not I would be drafted. I discerned that law was a great springboard for many, many people to other things. I wasn’t sure that I wanted to be a lawyer. I had read biographies of Clarence Darrow and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They were all very inspiring, but I just wasn’t sure I had the right stuff. And frankly, until I found immigration law, I was seriously looking for something else to do with my life.

Q: How can disillusioned lawyers avoid giving up on the field altogether?

A: I would say do some real soul-searching. Take personal inventory of what drew them to law in the first place and what they are now finding is not gratifying. It may require a change in approach. It may require a change in law firm. It may just require a change in attitude. The second thing is to find out what



are the skills that you have and where do you get the most enjoyment in the use of those skills.

One of my great loves throughout my life has been the theater and acting. I discerned there is a great deal of overlap between the skills of a good lawyer and the theater techniques that actors learn. I've taken recently a series of improvisational acting classes...I've taken acting techniques for the business professional. I pursue these passions of my life and weave them into law. I'm not saying everyone should do that, but you should do some soul-searching and find out what resonates with you.