



The male warrior/trial lawyer

Male trial lawyers are fighting issues of “hidden spirituality” and “false masculinity” that carry over into their professional relationships with women



Gwilliam

BY J. GARY GWILLIAM

These are changing times for men, especially in our profession. We men trial lawyers need to be aware of fundamental, profound and rapid changes in our roles as male warriors/trial lawyers.

This is a subject that has interested me for some time. In the 1990s I formed a men’s group and explored the whole emerging phenomena of the men’s movement. Now it is time to take another look at that whole issue, especially from the perspective of plaintiff’s trial lawyers.

While on my recent vacation to Africa, I read a thought provoking book called *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*, by Matthew Fox. Matthew Fox is a well-known, former Roman Catholic priest who has written and lectured about social and spiritual issues for many years.

In his preface he points out some of the observations that have become well-known in the men’s movement: that men have a lower life expectancy than women; the suicide rate among men is much higher than women (as much as three times more, although women attempt and fail at suicide more often than men); and men may not deal with stress as well as many women do because men often resist getting counseling or other help.

Hidden spirituality

Fox suggests that there are many reasons why men’s spirituality is “hidden,” including some that I have observed in my many years of lecturing to and consulting with trial lawyers, primarily men. Some of these include:

- Because Western culture is still a dualist patriarchy that values thinking over feeling, material wealth over spiritual, scientific fact over intuitive knowledge, men over women, and heterosexuals over homosexuals.
- Because men are rarely rewarded, and often mocked, for openly expressing their deepest feelings of joy, sensitivity, and pain. . .

- Because men, who are “not supposed to cry,” learn to hide their grief as well as their joy. . .
- Because men sometimes work so hard that they do not have time or space for exploring their hearts. . .
- Because, in an attempt to respect the women’s movement, some men feel compelled to silence themselves and hide any “unacceptable” maleness. . .
- Because communication between boys and fathers is often cold or nonexistent in our culture, and too many elders “retire” to the golf course rather than mentor younger generations. . .
- Because men don’t know how – and are not trained – to deal with their anger and outrage in healthy ways.

There are, of course, many other factors involved. However, men who decide to enter the world of litigation have to be “tough men.” In our world, the spiritual side is perhaps even more hidden than in the general male population. It’s therefore understandable that male trial lawyers frequently exhibit symptoms of out-of-balance masculinity – from taking tough guy attitudes to early bouts of alcoholism and substance abuse, and simply enduring the chronic stress that leads to physical and psychological debilitation, which in turn may lead to an early grave. Guys, it didn’t really work for us in the past, and it’s certainly not working now.

“False masculinity”

Matthew Fox describes a condition he refers to as a “false masculinity.” He states that “false masculinity” is almost always defined as a threat to our status as men and by its rejection of the feminine. It has created a problem in our profession as we have seen a sudden influx of women becoming trial lawyers. While this attitude of male superiority is less prevalent today than a decade ago, it is still instilled in some of my colleagues – and some readers of my past columns would say, in me. It is a problem that needs to be resolved.

Dealing with this problem requires that we develop balance in our lives and a respect for others. We need to learn from the strengths of women and use these traits for our advantage. It is



especially important that we understand the difference between the right and left brain and make a serious effort to get out of our traditional male dominated left-brain life thinking. How we deal with each other in our profession should be based on the same principles that good marriages and other strong relationships are based. These are equality, open communication and good listening skills. And most fundamental to our relationship

with women, whether in a personal or professional relationship, is respect. We need to emphasize our commonality and let go of our perceived differences. There is too much at stake in our war against tort reform and the forces of evil. Our clients' interests demand no less.

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