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## from the editor

By Catherine A. Lemmer



## What Are You Doing This Weekend?

In 1829, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story wrote, "The law is a jealous mistress and requires a long and constant courtship. It is not to be won by trifling favors, but by lavish homage." This statement still resonates with those of us working in legal environments in which expectations for 24/7 professional access blur the borders of our careers and personal lives. We carry company devices; respond to email queries and student questions on the weekends; research and write professional literature when possible; and attend firm, office, and university events in the evenings. Is it any wonder that we inwardly cringe when a boss or colleague asks, "What are you doing this weekend?"

At the same time, we know that many, if not most, interactions with colleagues outside of the office either are or have the potential to be very gratifying. In this issue of *Spectrum*, the Member to Member question asked AALL members to share a memorable experience with a colleague that occurred outside of the office. The responses are as varied as AALL's membership. Despite the variety of answers, the common theme that emerges is that activities outside of the office create better working relationships. Meeting and engaging with colleagues in an environment other than the workplace creates opportunities to learn about and better understand each other. This, in turn, leads to more successful workplace collaborations.

I, too, recently had an experience with a similar conclusion that I could have easily shared in response to the Member to Member question. My boss here at the LRC stopped me in the hallway and asked, "What are you doing this weekend?" She wanted to get together to discuss a report I had prepared. She also expressed that, "It would be a shame for anyone to come all the way to South Africa and not see Mpumalanga." I was a bit startled when she continued with, "I'll pick you up at 5 a.m. on Saturday and we can talk about the report on the way." Long story short, we did discuss the report and other work-related issues as we spent the day visiting Kruger National Park. I saw elephants, rhinos, baboons, and a stunning stand-off between a herd of zebras and a pack of wild dogs. More importantly, I learned about her and her expectations and goals for the organization. Similarly, I shared my professional goals and received some advice.

I am not suggesting that every opportunity to spend time outside the office with a co-worker will come with such fascinating scenery and terrific results. It is the case, however, that these are opportunities worth pursuing as they will engender a more successful working relationship that will serve your organization well.

So, how can we get past the "cringe" factor of feeling obligated to accept these invitations and reach a positive outcome for having done so? Without assuming that I have all the answers on this topic, I do have a few thoughts to share. First, whether the inviter or the invitee, all participants need to remember that there are appropriate roles and boundaries. It is also important to respect and be tolerant of the needs and comfort levels of colleagues. Observe preferences, solicit feedback, and adjust as needed. If you issue invitations and are declined, reevaluate the event and the setting. Maybe it isn't the after-work gathering time that is challenging but rather the location at which it is being held or the food that is being served. If, as a manager, your goal is to offer a social opportunity that builds trust and collegiality among your team, make sure everyone is going to be comfortable in the setting you choose.

As invitees, be genuine and keep an open mind when you receive an invitation. As my experience above suggests, first impressions can be deceiving. That being said, being genuine might also require that you decline an invitation for reasons that might not be apparent to the person who has extended it. If you don't like rugby or horse races, don't feel pressured to accept. Instead, graciously acknowledge the invite and offer an alternative for another time. Your colleague and you want the same result, so get there by acknowledging that there might be better ways to get there!

The upcoming AALL Annual Meeting in San Antonio should provide any number of opportunities to get to know your colleagues better. I look forward to seeing you there! ■

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