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# Life Lessons Learned Along the Way: Building a Shed: A Team Sport

*We continue our series of personal, impactful stories that have shaped how we practice law.*

By Thomas W. Werner

As happens to every parent, I was recently struck by how old my son is getting. Alex is 15. He is wrapping up his first very chaotic year of high school. He is enrolled in driver's training. He is filling out applications for a summer job with either a local ice cream place or a plant nursery. He has grown up to my eyebrows. Someday soon, I may have to crane my head to look at him.

While some parents look upon these signs of growing up with melancholy, I feel excitement for how my teenaged son and daughter (who will soon start teaching reading and writing to grade schoolers through Kumon) will change the world. My excitement grows when, as happened on a recent weekend, Alex and I engage in a brand-new activity that reinforces how many skills he has accumulated over his 15 years. On that recent weekend, Alex and I worked together to build a shed.

When I say, "together," I mean that I supervised and held several pieces of the shed – a 7 feet by 7 feet kit – in place while Alex interpreted the instructions, selected the right hardware and tool for each of the 30-something steps, and ensured that the shed came together as shown in the pictures on the two enormous boxes in which it had been delivered.

I knew that Alex was "handy"—far handier than I have ever been. I knew he had a knack for tools that my parents displayed, but which largely passed me by. From an early age, Alex would take apart Hot Wheels with wheels stuck in place, clean each part, build them again, and race them across the floor as if they had just come from the store. Soon, Alex began acquiring old hardware (door handles and deadbolts, shower heads and the like) and technology (a rotary phone here, a desktop computer tower there) for the purpose of taking them apart and reassembling them. Most of the time, he put them back together better than

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before he started. Whenever he was unsatisfied with any particular end result, he would start again, and then again until he had assembled each to his specifications.

Having seen Alex at work for years on end, when the shed kit was delivered to our driveway, I could think of no better person to “help me” than Alex. And “help me” he did. Over the course of several hours, with nary a complaint or an argument, Alex and I had that shed assembled. Piece after piece came out of the box. Starting with the floor and working our way to the 10 feet tall roof, I held pieces upright as Alex drilled and hammered, affixing them in place.

Stepping back and viewing the end result, in addition to being ever more impressed by my son, I couldn’t help but think how well that process echoed much of what I do as an attorney. When a new case is “delivered” to me, as I read through the initial materials, I think of the skill sets demonstrated by my colleagues, and I begin to plan out the best team to assist me. I decide which tasks will be perfect for our fantastic associate, Brian Mitzel or our terrific paralegal, Leanne Tarasiewicz. If the case presents issues with which I am unfamiliar, I consult with my partners. Where a factual expertise is needed, as was the case with a recently successfully resolved products liability matter involving the alleged failure of a prosthetic leg, I bring in potential experts who advise me on technical matters and who testify in vigorous defense of the client.

Just like my son and I building a shed, I work with the best team I could possibly assemble to build defenses from the floor up. I understand my strengths and my weaknesses. At times it’s me holding pieces upright while my team assembles them together. At other times, I’m the assembler. Because of this team approach, at all times I remain confident that the resultant defenses will come together and stand upright against all possible elements.

Just like I have with Alex and his shed-building prowess, I have a team around me that will compliment my strengths and my weaknesses. Just as it was with my recently-concluded prosthetics product liability matter, and as it was with the shed that Alex and I built, I know that I will always be proud of my team.

In our next article, [No Harm, Yet Still Foul?](#) Kathleen Klaus provides insight on Fair Debt

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Collection Practices Act issues that can arise for collection attorneys using third-party vendors to print and mail their form correspondence.

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