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Focus on What Matters Most in the New Year

As we start the New Year, it's a great time to think about how we spend our time and focus on what really matters. Many of us fall into a habit of always tackling what feels urgent while pushing aside things that are truly important. As a trial lawyer, I deal with deadlines every day. Court filings, depositions, and hearings demand my immediate attention. But I've realized that constantly jumping from one urgent task to the next means I'm often ignoring things that are important but don't have a deadline. Does this sound familiar to you?

I cannot claim to have reached perfection with time management, but I am a believer that progress is better than perfection. Stephen Covey, in his book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," introduces a useful tool called the Eisenhower Matrix. This matrix divides tasks into four categories:

- 1. Urgent and Important** — These are pressing problems that need immediate attention, like deadlines or emergencies.
- 2. Not Urgent but Important** — These are things like building relationships, planning for the future, exercising, and self-care. These tasks help us achieve our long-term goals and align with our values.
- 3. Urgent but Not Important** — These are interruptions, emails, or other people's priorities that feel pressing but don't really matter in the big picture.
- 4. Not Urgent and Not Important** — These are distractions, like excessive scrolling on social media or binge-watching TV.

The key to better time management is spending more time on Quadrant 2 — the tasks that are important but not urgent. These are the activities that help us grow and improve, yet they're often the first to be pushed aside because they don't have immediate deadlines. For example, how often have you said, "I'll get to my health goals after work slows down," or "I'll spend more time with my family once I finish this project"? It's easy to let urgent tasks take over, but the cost of ignoring the important can be huge.

So, how do we make time for what really matters?

- 1. Plan Ahead:** Take some time at the start of each week to look at your schedule. Block time for activities that are important to you, like family dinners, exercising, or working on long-term projects. Treat these blocks as appointments you can't miss.

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- 2. Use the Eisenhower Matrix:** When new tasks come up, ask yourself: Is this urgent? Is it important? If it's not both, consider whether it's something you can delay, delegate, or skip altogether.
- 3. Set Boundaries:** Learn to say no to things that aren't important. If you're constantly saying yes to every request, you'll have less time for what truly matters.
- 4. Reflect and Adjust:** At the end of each day or week, take a moment to review how you spent your time. Did you focus on important tasks, or were you stuck in a cycle of reacting to the urgent? Use this reflection to make changes for the week ahead.

I have two Post-it notes on my computer that read "Important" and "Urgent" as a reminder throughout my day to prioritize what matters most. I also plan out my upcoming week and batch similar tasks within the same block of time to be more efficient. Two books that have helped me with time management are "Atomic Habits" by James Clear and "Deep Work" by Cal Newport. "Atomic Habits" helps you create small, meaningful changes that build over time, while "Deep Work" shows you how to focus deeply on important tasks without distractions.

As we step into 2025, let's commit to better time management. Let's use tools like the Eisenhower Matrix to make sure we're focusing on the important things that matter most. By doing this, we can start the year with purpose and make time for what truly counts in our lives.

-Brian O'Connor



Babies Delivered Via Mail?

HOW AMERICA'S YOUNGEST WERE ONCE MAILED TO GRANDMA'S

Oh, the good old days of 1913, when the U.S. Post Office decided to let just about anything — and we mean anything — go through the mail. Imagine a time when sending eggs, bricks, and even your college laundry via post was the norm. When the U.S. Post Office first began offering parcel service, one of the first packages sent was a brindle English bulldog!

But of course, it gets stranger. The initial days of the Parcel Post service saw creative shipping solutions, including more than one instance of a surprise opossum delivery in Flushing, Queens. Then, parents short on cash or time decided to do something truly questionable: shipping their own children.



In those early days, some parents took the phrase “special delivery” to a new level by mailing their kids! Just a few weeks after the service began, one Ohio couple decided their 8-month-old son, James, needed to visit Grandma and figured the mail was the best way to get him there. Weighing in just under the 11-pound limit, baby James cost a mere 15 cents to mail. Talk about a budget-friendly travel option!

If it's any consolation, parents didn't hand off these pint-sized parcels to strangers. In most cases, the local mail carriers in these rural communities were well-known to the families

and trusted with these precious deliveries. Take 5-year-old May Pierstorff, who was mailed about 75 miles to her grandparents. Or 3-year-old Maude Smith, who traveled from Caney to Jackson, Kentucky, with snacks in hand and a shipping label sewn to her dress.

It wasn't until after several instances and a good deal of head-scratching by the postal authorities that regulations tightened up. Parents could no longer avoid train ticket costs by handing their kids to the local postal carrier.

Today, thankfully, we have more sensible travel options for our kids. The days of slapping stamps on their clothing and waving as they disappear with the mail are long gone. But the stories we have from those early days of mail mischief are sure to remind us that thrifty parents will go to any lengths to save a few dimes!

UNPACK AMERICA'S QUIRKIEST STATE LAWS

From Forbidden Fortune Telling to Sandwich Shop Silence

Every state has its own bizarre laws, and while they make for a fun read, the fact is that these rules were once created to address some specific “problem!” From unusual dress codes for hot dog vendors in Florida to bizarre regulations about fighting birds in Indiana, every state has its share of head-scratchers. Let's take a stroll through six of the wackiest laws — you can't make this stuff up!

Quiet Hours for Sandwich Lovers

In Arkansas, think twice before honking your horn at a sandwich shop after 9 p.m. This law might have stemmed from one too many late-night sandwich cravings disturbing the peace. So, keep your sandwich enthusiasm to a respectable volume!

Dress Code for Hot Dog Vendors

In Florida, hot dog vendors must think twice about skimpy wardrobes as a marketing tactic. Dressing provocatively is

a no-go, as it's considered a serious traffic hazard. So, those planning to sell hot dogs should keep their attire conservative to avoid stirring up more than just appetites.

Fight Back Birds in Indiana

In Indiana, you can only throw a rock at a bird if you're defending yourself. Hopefully, you'll never find yourself in such a peculiar predicament (or Hitchcockian nightmare), but it's good to know the law's got your back — just in case.

No Clairvoyance in Cedar Rapids

Fancy yourself a fortune teller in Cedar Rapids, Iowa? Think again. Practices like palm reading or phrenology are off limits, preserving the town's focus on the tangible here and now rather than the mystical future.

Grease Is the Word in North Carolina

In North Carolina, stealing over \$1,000 of used restaurant grease is a felony.



Yes, **used** grease! As biodiesel's popularity rises, so does the value of this slippery commodity — so keep your hands away from the grimy fryer vats.

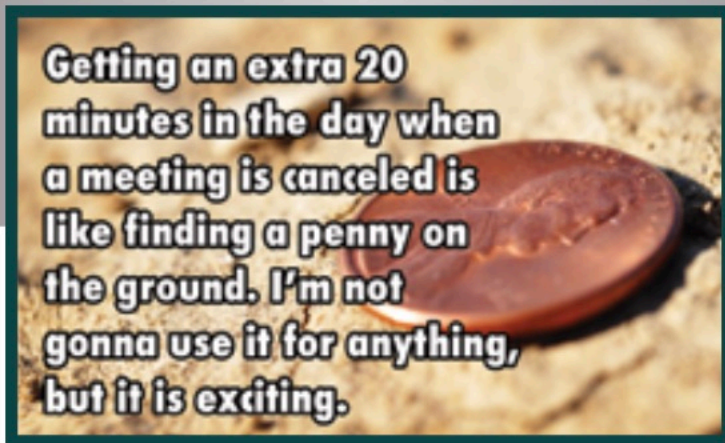
Oklahoma's Animal Antics

And finally, in Oklahoma, you'd better not find yourself tripping a horse or wrestling a bear. Engaging in or even promoting these dangerous and unusual animal antics is illegal. It's all fun and games until someone gets a bear hug they didn't ask for!

So, next time you think you've heard it all, remember: The law books might have a few more surprises waiting for you.



TAKE A *BREAK*



CITRUS OLIVE OIL CAKE

Inspired by GimmeSomeOven.com



INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup almond flour
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2/3 cup medium-grind cornmeal
- 1 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp sea salt
- 3 eggs
- 3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp almond extract
- Zest of 1 lemon, plus 2 tbsp juice
- Zest of 1 orange, plus 2 tbsp juice
- Powdered sugar, optional

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat oven to 350 F. Line the bottom of a 9-inch springform pan with parchment and lightly grease the sides with cooking spray.
2. In a large mixing bowl, whisk almond flour, sugar, cornmeal, baking powder, and salt until combined.
3. In another bowl, whisk eggs, olive oil, vanilla, almond extract, and lemon and orange zest and juice. Combine the wet ingredients with the dry ingredients.
4. Pour batter into the springform pan. Bake for 35–40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Let cool for 15 minutes.
5. Run a knife gently around the edges of the cake, then remove the sides of the pan. If desired, dust cake with powdered sugar using a fine-mesh strainer.

SHINING THE LIGHT ON LIGHTHOUSE PARENTING

A Balanced Approach to Raising Independent Children

Among the countless parenting styles out there, an approach called “lighthouse parenting” is a beacon for guiding children through life’s turbulent waters while giving them the space to navigate on their own. While it may sound ideal, is it the right parenting style for your kids?

What is lighthouse parenting?

Coined by Dr. Ken Ginsburg, a professor of pediatrics at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, lighthouse parenting is a philosophy detailed in his book “Raising Kids to Thrive.” This approach emphasizes a balance of nurturing and communicating with children while allowing them the freedom to grow independently. Just as a lighthouse guides without steering the ship itself, lighthouse parents offer direction and ensure safety without overly controlling their children’s lives.

It advocates for a balanced approach.

Lighthouse parenting positions itself in the sweet spot on the parenting spectrum — not as overbearing as helicopter parenting nor as detached as free-range parenting. It focuses on being emotionally present and available, providing a safe space for children to bring up issues and learn from their experiences. This method involves:

- **Checking in Regularly:** Ensuring open lines of communication.
- **Encouraging Autonomy:** Allowing kids the freedom to make decisions and learn from the outcomes.
- **Promoting Resilience:** Supporting children as they navigate challenges, helping them to develop coping skills and independence.

Parents set boundaries and offer support.

Unlike authoritarian parenting, which might stifle a child’s sense of independence, lighthouse parenting encourages self-reliance through trust and minimal but firm boundaries. Parents provide the framework, trusting the kids to make good decisions. This method helps to build a robust support system where children know they have the safety net of their parents’ guidance when needed.



Keep the Light On

Adopting the lighthouse method involves unconditional love paired with expectations and boundaries. It’s about guiding children through the complexities of growing up without removing the essential experiences that teach them about life. Of course, no single parenting style is perfect for every child. How you reinforce lighthouse parenting depends entirely on your child’s needs and developmental trajectory. Ultimately, lighthouse parenting aims to prepare children to thrive independently, ensuring they know the way back to shore, no matter how far away they sail.



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FROM AGGRAVATED ASSAULT TO DENTAL DRAMA

Runaway 'Dentist' Dodges Detection

While TikTok may be a go-to app for funny videos, it's probably not the best way to find a new dentist.

Last year, Texas-based "dentist" Nikki Calloway used TikTok to generate buzz for her business, ISmilez Cosmetic Designz. The campaign attracted new patients, including one who scheduled an appointment after receiving a \$1,350 quote from Calloway to have 16 teeth removed, replaced, and a bridge added. There was only one problem: "Nikki Calloway" wasn't a licensed dentist. In reality, she was Juanetta Solomon, a notorious local felon with a long history of crime. The botched dental surgery left the patient dizzy, bleeding, and with a tooth that fell out shortly afterward — and prompted Solomon to go on the run from the law.

According to authorities, Solomon had operated her "dentistry" office while out on bond for a weapons charge. Her past

offenses include assault with a deadly weapon, aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, and unlawful carrying of a weapon by a felon — and that was just in 2023 and 2024! In one infamous case, she was accused of shooting at her boyfriend's former girlfriend. Her record also includes a December 2016 conviction for the delivery of a controlled substance.

"Juanetta Solomon is the definition of a career habitual offender," commented Andy Kahan, director of victim services and advocacy at Crime Stoppers of Houston, in a story on Katy Magazine Online. "She's been in prison multiple times in different counties, so it's no surprise she is once again wanted. Her latest offense is extremely brutal, pretending to be a dentist [and] causing undue pain and stress on individuals, so the quicker we get her back in custody, the less anyone has to suffer as a result of her criminal conduct."



Law enforcement was still attempting to capture Solomon at the time of this writing. Her bizarre turn as a "dentist" serves as a chilling reminder that Google and a little research — not social media — are the best tools to determine whether your chosen provider is a professional or someone destined for prison.