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Check Us Out!

COMING HOME

A YEAR OF GROWTH, REFLECTION, AND LOOKING AHEAD

December has always been a season that invites reflection. As we prepare for the holidays and look toward a new year, many of us find ourselves taking stock of where we have been and what lies ahead. This year, that feeling is especially meaningful for me because our firm reached a milestone that is professional and deeply personal: We opened a new office in Brooklyn, just minutes away from my childhood home.

I was born in East Flatbush and attended St. Vincent Ferrer Grammar School before my family moved to Staten Island just before I started high school. Those early years shaped a lot of who I am today. Returning to the neighborhood feels like coming full circle and reminds me of how connected I still am to the communities that raised me.

But this new office is about much more than square footage. Just like the lessons I have shared throughout the year, such as encouraging my kids to embrace challenges while snorkeling on vacation or learning the importance of prioritizing what truly matters, opening a Brooklyn location reflects a theme we have carried forward all year: growth with intention.

A Year in Review

As 2025 comes to a close, I am proud to say this has been a year of meaningful expansion for our firm.

Welcoming Amira and Kim to the Team

We were fortunate to bring on two outstanding team members, Amira and Kim, who have strengthened our ability to communicate, support our clients, and keep cases moving efficiently. They have jumped in with enthusiasm and compassion, and their dedication has already made a difference.

Opening the Brooklyn Office

After years of serving Brooklyn residents from afar, we now have a local and accessible space where clients can meet with us in their own neighborhood. This office allows us to provide the same personal and community-centered support that has always been at the heart of our practice.

HELP OUR BROOKLYN OFFICE WITH A GOOGLE REVIEW!

Your review helps other find a legal team they can trust. Simply scan the QR code to leave a review.



Investing in Technology That Serves You

We also continued to modernize our work processes, from digital document tools to enhanced communication systems, always with the goal of making the legal process clearer, faster, and less stressful. These enhancements reflect our commitment to meeting clients where they are and improving their experience at every step.

An Invitation to Pause and Reflect

As much as this article is about our growth, I want it to be an invitation to you as well. Every December, I am reminded of how valuable it is to pause, even briefly, and ask ourselves a few grounding questions:

What changed for me this year?

Where did I grow?

What challenges made me stronger?

What do I want more of in the year ahead?

Whether your goals involve health, family, financial stability, or simply slowing down to enjoy life, this is the perfect moment to consider the direction you want to move in. As I have learned through the experiences shared in past newsletters, from family traditions at Breezy Point to navigating shifting priorities, reflection helps us create clarity. Clarity helps us build momentum.

As 2025 comes to a close, thank you for being part of our extended community. I wish you and your loved ones a warm and peaceful holiday season and a hopeful start to the new year.

-Brian O'Connor





FINE-PRINT FOCUS

DON'T SIGN THAT JOB OFFER BLINDLY

In today's competitive job market, landing new employment is the least of your worries.

Depending on your chosen industry, you may be required to review and sign an employment contract before starting a new position. Ideally, this document will clearly outline what your new employer offers you to work for them and the responsibilities they expect you to fulfill.

While the concept is simple enough, a host of nuances and potential red flags in an employee contract may reveal that your new job is more (or less) than you expected. Considering that the average U.S. employee stays with a single employer for approximately four years before moving on, reviewing your employee contract carefully ensures the job of your dreams doesn't devolve into a logistical, financial, or professional nightmare. Here are three key questions to consider before agreeing to the contract terms presented to you.

Does the contract accurately describe your role?

In many cases, an online job description is the employer's wish list of duties that could fall under that role. Specific responsibilities related to a particular position may be refined during the interview and negotiation process, especially if the employer is in a transitional period of restructuring its workflow and employee roles. When reviewing your employee contract, confirm that your job title, duties, payment terms and methods, and length of service (if the position is temporary) are described accurately.

"No two employee contracts are exactly alike, so it's essential to diligently review any documentation you receive, even if you need to bring in a legal professional for an extra pair of eyes."



Never disregard a seemingly minor typo as a slight variation in a job title (e.g., "managerr" or "supervisor" versus "manager") could be enough to impact your anticipated compensation, workday obligations, and even your tax status. Even the most professional companies can make mistakes in drafting documentation, so never assume Human Resources has everything covered.

Do the perks make sense as presented?

In addition to confirming exactly what you'll do and be paid, you must ensure any benefits outlined in the contract align with your expectations or with anything you may have been told during interview(s) and negotiation(s). Review all insurance benefits, paid vacations, PTO/sick leave structures, retirement plans, and bonuses detailed in the contract before signing, and immediately raise any questions or concerns with the appropriate parties.

What is yours, and what is your employer's?

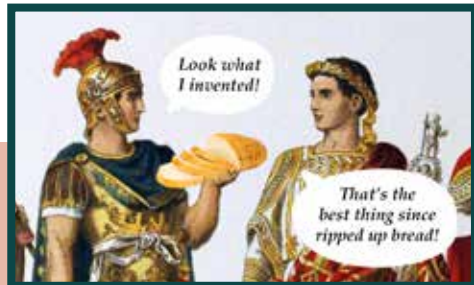
With remote work on the rise, your employer may be based in another state. Your employee contract should detail your remote status and any expectations for occasional "hybrid" work (e.g., working at the corporate office once a week) and work-related travel. Expense reimbursement is another factor to consider when reading your contract. Review any provisions regarding your responsibilities in using employer-supplied equipment (laptops, printers, scanners, etc.) required for your remote position.

Sometimes, your work may entail creating intellectual property the employer owns. For example, if you make digital media for a company, you likely won't be able to apply it to your personal use or bring it to a subsequent employer. The employee contract will likely include specific proprietary rights and intellectual property language. Before agreeing to an employer's contract terms, you should address any verification needs.

These questions are just the tip of the iceberg. No two employee contracts are exactly alike, so it's essential to diligently review any documentation you receive, even if you need to bring in a legal professional for an extra pair of eyes.

Good luck with your job search, and happy reading!

TAKE A *BREAK*



Syllables That Shape Society

THE 'SAXON CLINCHER' EFFECT

The right selection of syllables can change the course of history.

As any English teacher or professional editor (or anyone who's ever confused "they're," "there," or "their") will tell you, navigating modern English is often chaotic and confounding. In a 2020 blog, Ward Farnsworth of the University of Texas School of Law attempted to explain how it got this way.

"English is a language built mostly out of two others. Much of it was created from the language of invaders who came to Britain around 450 AD from Anglia and Saxony (in what we'd now call northern Germany). About 600 years later, the French [Normans] invaded and brought their language with them, too, derived from Latin. The new French competed with Old English, and the eventual outcome was modern English, built out of both."

Farnsworth's observation isn't new. Various speeches by President Abraham Lincoln, largely considered one of the world's greatest orators, made excellent use of this mix of languages by understanding that Anglo-Saxon words tend to be direct and words of French origin tend to be a bit more flowery. Lincoln applied these characteristics to create what some linguistic circles call a "Saxon clincher," a straightforward conclusion to a more colorfully worded introduction. A Saxon clincher can be employed to gain attention with impactful opening words before driving the point home more simply.

According to Farnsworth, Lincoln's talent for perfecting this approach shines through in this passage from his "House Divided" speech in 1858:

Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.

Did you notice how the first half includes colorful words such as "opponents" and "extinction," and the final 14 words are simple with one syllable each? That's the Saxon clincher, and the pathway to a perfect speech, in a nutshell.

BAKED FETA, TOMATO, AND WHITE BEAN SKILLET

INGREDIENTS

- 2 pints cherry tomatoes
- 2 (15-oz) cans no-salt-added cannellini beans, rinsed
- 4 medium cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 tsp Italian seasoning
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 6 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 6 oz feta cheese, packed in brine, cut into 4 pieces
- 1 tbsp hot honey
- Basil leaves, for garnish
- 4 slices toasted whole-wheat country bread, optional, for serving

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 450 F.
2. In a large, oven-safe skillet, combine tomatoes, beans, garlic, Italian seasoning, and salt.
3. Drizzle with 5 tbsp of olive oil and stir gently.
4. Add feta pieces 2 inches apart in the mixture and drizzle with remaining olive oil.
5. Bake for 30–35 minutes, or until the tomatoes have burst.
6. Remove from oven and drizzle with hot honey. Garnish with basil leaves, and serve with toast if desired.

Inspired by [EatingWell.com](https://www.eatingwell.com)



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SLIPS, SCREAMS, AND SETTLEMENTS

A 'Leatherface' Lawsuit Leaves a Mark

If you're a horror film fan, you know how common it is for a would-be victim to trip and fall long enough to allow the killer chasing them to catch up and carry out some nasty deed. While this scene is a classic cliché of the genre, it would strike genuine terror in anyone's heart if it played out in the real world, especially when you're a 57-year-old woman with her grandchild in tow.

In the late 1990s, Cleanthi Peters accompanied her 10-year-old granddaughter to a Hell's High haunted house attraction at Universal Studios in Florida. As their walk-through was about to end, an actor portraying the menacing character Leatherface from the "Texas Chainsaw Massacre" film franchise began chasing them while wielding a fake chainsaw. As the frightened pair began running away from the grotesque antagonist, they slipped on a wet spot on the floor, just like in the movies. Instead of breaking character to help them, the actor playing the pretend psychopath continued to menace the two by standing above them with his torturous tool still in his hands.

Claiming the incident left her and her granddaughter "extremely fearful and in mental distress and anguish," Peters later sued Universal Studios for emotional distress and other injuries. After numerous trials, the suit was decided in Peters' favor, resulting in a \$15,000 judgment against Universal Studios for failure to keep its haunted house safe for occupants. While this case occurred in Florida, legal experts have opined that the verdict may have been the same in other states, since an unsafe wet floor wouldn't be a reasonable expectation for anyone attending a haunted house attraction.

While Hell's High may have succeeded in frightening Peters and her granddaughter, the suit proves that horror-themed entertainment can sometimes be too scary, especially for the defendant's legal counsel, and Leatherface is best encountered from the comfort of a TV or movie theater screen.

