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# IN SIGHT

*for Oregon Lawyers*

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

## OVERCOMING PERSONAL ADVERSITY

I am a litigator, trying mostly personal injury cases. I handle real estate closings as well.

My personal adversity is multiple sclerosis, a neurological disease that is sometimes relapsing and remitting and sometimes, as in my case, progressive. I was diagnosed over 12 years ago, while I worked for a firm. I remained at the firm for three years and then split off and went into practice with a former partner. I am still trying cases, sometimes out of my wheelchair.

My condition has progressed to the point where it is visible, and frankly, it's a whole lot easier now. When I first disclosed my illness to my colleagues, they were incredibly supportive. Coming out of the closet with one's adversity is a very good thing. Most people have some personal difficulty they are dealing with. Once you're honest with them, they are honest back; you can be closer in the ways that count, and relationships are better.

Being willing to get help is really important. I found that my colleagues were very willing to help me carry my stuff to court so I could continue to try cases. I get help all the time, and from surprising places. As my disease progressed, and I had to depend on a walker, and then a manual wheelchair, I actually would call opposing counsel and ask them if they could meet me at the court to help me get the walker or wheelchair out of the car and to help carry my briefcases. We'd battle it out in court, and then afterwards they'd graciously help me back into my car! Sadly, although court personnel are very helpful, the courts aren't as accessible as

they should be. I'm now very committed to improving accessibility and feel very good about that. I hope I make a contribution to that cause just by going to court and pointing out the deficiencies.

I keep discovering that everyone out there is dealing with some kind of adversity, and that people love to help. Even the people I'm fighting with are willing to help me.

Perhaps it's the "There but for the grace of God go I" phenomenon – I think people really understand that. I have learned that it doesn't hurt to show vulnerability. Showing vulnerability doesn't mean that the other guy wins. Vulnerability is not weakness. It is reality; it's a fact of life, a universal condition of our humanness, which connects us to one another more than anything else. Lawyers are not exempt. To the extent that we expect to be otherwise, we impose on ourselves an unwarranted isolation and alienation.

### Working for Accessibility

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