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Start Walking and See What Happens

Career Development



One Saturday morning in October 2001, I stood in a hotel room at the Washington Hilton, staring out at the traffic below. I was there for a healthcare law conference. I was early because my supervisor noted that the reduced airfare if I went Saturday instead of Sunday was more than enough to cover another night at the hotel, so I should consider going early to have some fun before the conference began Monday morning. This seemed like a fine idea. At the time, I hadn't been to DC since high school and I was game for a visit.

Even so, once I'd checked in and unpacked, I wondered how this was supposed to work. I'd never done any solo tourism before. I called my wife, a veteran traveler, for guidance. "Hang up the phone, and go outside," she said.

"Then what?"

"Just start walking, and see what happens." I headed southeast on Connecticut Avenue. Within a few hours, I'd bought two pairs of shoes (and learned that the European size 48 is the closest I'll ever come to the mythical size 13½ I'd chased since I was a teen), eaten a delightful plate of steak frites at a little bistro off of Dupont Circle, caught the tail end of a protest march (I never learned what about, though it seemed those at the end of the line were protesting several things at once, and inordinately fond of giant papier-mache heads), and watched from the steps of the Jefferson Memorial as a squad of attack helicopters patrolled over the Tidal Basin (we were just past 9/11 at this point). All in all, I had a remarkable day.

Many of us have similar opportunities ahead as we contemplate heading to San Francisco for this year's ACC Annual Meeting. Thanks to that DC trip, I've tried every year since I started attending in

2005 to arrive early enough to get out and explore a little, and I encourage you to give it a try. In fact, think about making time for yourself not just before the meeting, but during and after it as well. More specifically, I suggest that you:

Arrive early. Consider arriving on Saturday morning, and taking the day to unwind, unpack, get your bearings, and maybe see a few sights. It's a hard decision for many to increase the time away from home and family; ironically, that may be just the sign that you're overdue for a little non-obligatory time away.

Don't rush off. The CLE sessions scheduled for Wednesday morning were prepared with every bit as much time and effort as those on the previous two days, yet many cut the day short to be part of the mass exodus to the airport. Think about heading home early the following morning, and attending to some work in the comfort of your hotel room Wednesday afternoon to ease the transition back.

Skip a session. Or three. This is a tough one, because (a) there's almost always something of interest during any given time slot, and (b) your (and your company's) commitment of time and expense tends to reinforce the desire to maximize value by getting all the CLE credits available. Even so, you'll need some down time to catch up on work, exercise, or take a nap. A friend with school-age children suggested to me that this parallels the advice given by parents who've survived taking small children to Disney — a little break time each day makes the rest of the schedule much easier to enjoy.

Meet people. That DC conference was fine in terms of the material presented, but it also amounted to two days in the company of hundreds of harried attorneys straining to sit still and listen when there was so much work to be done on the laptop in the hotel room, which is where they apparently all scurried to once the last session ended each day. I was happy to discover how different the ACC Annual Meetings are — this organization is easily the most collegial one I've ever been a part of, and the relationships I've formed and strengthened at these meetings are the biggest benefit of my membership, and the reason I've stayed involved over the years. Visit the exhibit hall, attend the lunches, try some of the sponsor events each evening; you can't help but meet good and interesting people if you do.

The Annual Meeting is so much more than CLEs. If you don't know that already, this is your year to find out!

[Jeffrey W. Wheeler](#)



Associate General Counsel

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