Introduction
(Another Book? Really?)

Groundhog Day

I never expected to be writing another introduction for a Ten Things book after the good people at the ABA published the first one way back in April 2017. Yet, here we are with volume two—an even bigger collection of “wisdom” extracted from the molars of the Ten Things You Need to Know as In-House Counsel blog series. I started the blog back in November 2014 after retiring as general counsel of Sabre Corporation here in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. The blog has always been about discussing issues important to in-house lawyers in a simple, practical, and useful way. Apparently, that type of writing is hard to come by and the blog took off like a ballistic missile. Over four years later, it’s still going strong. So strong that people were clamoring for a second volume. Those people primarily being my mom and some accounting types at the ABA publishing arm. I heard you! All kidding aside, I am pleased that I get the chance to share more of my Ten Things work with you. Before we get started, however, let’s back up a bit from when I last left you.

Previously on…

If you read volume one, then you already have a pretty good idea of who I am and how I got to the point where that book was published. Like Game of Thrones, The Last Kingdom, or any good TV show, I won’t repeat everything I set out in that first introduction. But it was a damn good introduction—lemonade stand scandal anyone?—so be sure to go back and read it again (or for the first time because who really reads introductions anyway, right?). Even better, if you haven’t already, get out your credit card and go buy the first book and read it now. Immediately. Time’s a wasting! But, if you’re not up for going back and re-reading the volume one introduction here is your “previously, on…” moment.

I grew up in a small town in Nebraska. York, Nebraska, to be exact, population around 6,000 hearty Midwestern souls. We did everything everyone does in a small
town growing up: set up wildly elaborate Hot Wheels road tracks, had massive G.I. Joe wars, rode our bikes everywhere, drank a lot of beer when we could (and we could), and somehow made it through the mind-numbing, soul-sucking, confusion-driven drudgery that is high school. I went to college in Lincoln at Nebraska Wesleyan University and—after some laughable detours into math and the hard sciences—realized my true calling was indeed the law. So, I headed to St. Louis and attended law school at Washington University. I started working at a mid-size law firm in St. Louis after graduation and after I got married a few years later, moved to Dallas, Texas, where I landed an in-house position at American Airlines (and eventually became a dad to two awesome daughters and wondered aloud how anyone could have lived in Texas before air-conditioning).

I loved being an in-house lawyer. So much that I moved to Sabre Corporation (then a subsidiary of American Airlines) and from there to be general counsel at Sabre’s subsidiary Travelocity.com (I was the guy who voted “no” on the gnome), and then back to Sabre to take the big job when the general counsel there retired. After 20 years, 10 as general counsel and a successful IPO in 2014, I hung up the cleats and retired from Sabre myself. That’s when I started the blog. Mostly to give myself something to do with all my newfound idle time, but also to set down the things I had learned over a long in-house career. And a few months after that I started working part-time in the Dallas office of a boutique law firm, Hilgers Graben PLLC. I wrote a book on football and I keep cranking away at the blog which quickly got a following far beyond my wildest expectations. And that’s where we left off in volume one. Whew! Jammed a lot in there. Need to catch my breath for a minute. Okay, I’m good. Now I need to catch you up on what happened next.

What’s Up, Doc?

A few months after volume one was published, I got a call from a very good friend of mine. He was now the CFO of a small software company based in Silicon Valley near San Francisco. They needed a general counsel and he had me in mind for the job since we had worked together in the same roles at Sabre several years before. I, of course, immediately said, “no thanks.” A few days pass and he called me back determined to bring me on board, I budge a bit and ask him to tell me about the job, the company, and the offer. It all sounds really good. And like a lot of fun. But, I said there is little chance my wife is going to want me to go back into the game after several years away, especially if I was going to have to live near San Francisco and eventually Denver. Still, I told him, I was willing to raise it with her at dinner that night and if she said “yes” (however unlikely) I was his guy. At dinner, I walked her through the job, the living in San Francisco/Denver part, and the offer. As she often does, she paused and looked me in the eye and said, “Miller, you’d be a %$#ing
idiot not to take this job.” So, one week later, I packed my bags and headed to San Francisco, as the new general counsel of Marketo, Inc. It was awesome. I had a great team. The company was fun and interesting. The executive team was top-notch (and very likable). It was everything you could want as a general counsel. The move to Denver was even better. I lived downtown in my cool two-bedroom guy pad. I had a two-block walk to the office. I didn’t even have a car. Everything I needed was right there around me. Except for my wife which was a bummer, but we found ways around the distance to make it work. While I was back in-house at Marketo I found writing the blog even more interesting because I was living out in real-time what I was writing about.

Back on the Street

Marketo was owned by a great private equity group, Vista Equity Partners. I knew when I took the job that at some point they would sell the company and I would, most likely, be out of a job (which was fine). I figured it would take about 2–3 years to get to an exit. A little over a year after I started the CEO called me to tell me the company was up for bid. About 45 days later we announced that Adobe was buying Marketo. The deal closed on Halloween 2018. I knew Adobe didn’t need another general counsel (they had an excellent one already) and I had promised my wife that once the company was sold, I would come back home subject to a transition period. Mine was short (yay!) and on January 1, 2019, I was back in Dallas and a free agent once again. I took about a month off and then started back with Hilgers Graben, where I am now. I miss the great people at Marketo, especially my team as we did a lot of great work and had a blast doing it. But, while it was a fantastic situation for me on many levels, I am very happy to be back home full-time.

So, What Does It All Mean?

I went to see Monty Python and the Meaning of Life when I was in college. All I got out of it about the meaning of life was a lot of laughs (and to stay away from the salmon mousse). But, as I get older, I am starting to look back a lot more and think about the choices I have made. One thing I ask myself is whether I’ll ever go back in-house after three tours as a general counsel. The answer—like to so many questions in life—is definitely maybe. I enjoy where I am in my career right now. The firm treats me extremely well and I can still write the blog and, as many of you know, other books—like my third one, a slow-cooker cookbook published in November 2018, by Mill City Press called The Slow Cooker Savant. The bottom line is that I have found the job of in-house counsel to be among the best gigs a lawyer can get. I have zero regrets about my career choices and would not trade
my experiences in-house for anything. Lots of great work, interesting businesses, and lots of laughs. Definitely, a lot of laughs—usually at times when you would not expect to be laughing, like 2:30 a.m. locked in a conference room at an airport hotel trying to settle a multi-billion-dollar piece of litigation. Sure, there are some bad days as an in-house lawyer but probably less than most jobs—well, most lawyer jobs anyway. At least in my opinion. And like all great jobs, it really comes down to the people you meet along the way. I am fortunate to be able to say that I made a lot of friends and can name the number of jerk bosses and jerk colleagues on the one hand (and I don’t even have to count the thumb). I have had great bosses and mentors, people who took a real interest in me and my career and unselfishly helped me go as far as I wanted to go. I feel my obligation is to do the same for as many people as I can before I eat the salmon mousse myself. And it’s very satisfying to see people who worked for me become general counsel or placed in other high-level in-house positions.

Shut Up Already!

Sorry. Got going and it’s hard to stop. But it brings us to volume two which you are likely holding in your hands as you read this as I’m still waiting on the invite for books-on-tape (ABA?). Once again, I have culled through my blog posts (posted since volume one was written) and organized them into useful categories, updated them in places, tweaked them to read like book form rather than blog form, and so on. Reading through them all again (and again, and again), I see that there is a lot of my life tied up in each chapter. Lessons I learned the hard way (or the soft way if someone took the time to teach me beforehand) bring back lots of memories of people and time periods, not just at the office but at home where my wife and daughters lived my ups and downs with me—at least when they saw me. Fortunately, there have been way more ups than downs. I hope you find the book useful—even more so when combined with volume one—the set makes an excellent gift! I am not sure there will be a volume three. Maybe. But I don’t want this to turn into something unnecessary, like Rocky 6 or Smokey and the Bandit 3. When the time comes, I will quit while I am ahead. But we’ll see. For now, enjoy the book and check out the blog at www.TenThings.net. There’s still a lot more to say!

Sterling Miller
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