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**REMARKS FOR EDLS EXIT SEMINAR | ALEXANDRA T. HALL | 25 MAY 2023**

Acknowledging the protocol already established, I wish to thank you the Principal of the Eugene Dupuch Law School for inviting me to speak as a part of this year's Exit Seminar. To all second year students, congratulations on making it this far!! It is the final countdown!!! I hope that you are as proud of yourselves as I know your friends and family are of you. First year students, you will be here soon enough.

When approached my mind immediately ran to the lessons that I have learnt (either from the wisdom of others or the hard way) since I was in Bar School and things I have observed over my years of practice. I don't want to scare you but I think that it is important to share this information with you as honestly as possible. I

Unlike a traditional motivational speech I thought that it would be more beneficial to organise this like the personal development lectures that I listen to often, with one line take aways that you can quickly scribble down on your smartphones. I am not going to go through them in any particular order of significance.

My first piece of advice to you is: Remember "CASE". When I was in Bar School more than a decade ago a lecturer said to us that we should always remember CASE – Copy And Steal Everything!! Law is a strange profession because years of academic training does not prepare you for practice. On your first day you will come to the shocking realization of how little you know. This feeling will continue for years.



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Observe those who are senior to you and copy what they are doing well and learn from what they are doing badly. You do not have to learn lessons the hard way. Until the day you retire continue to learn from other practitioners. There is always something that you can do to improve yourself.

Secondly, “Act your wage”. A few years ago I heard this statement from a black American financial expert whom I follow online and realise that it is the basis of many issues. Yes, you are lawyers now and you want to live like the lawyers on Suits. But that is not reality.

In your first years of employment you will not be highly valued and non-lawyers will earn more than you. Later in your career if you are on profit sharing at a Firm there will be years when your colleagues will make significantly more than you. However, in the words of Buju Banton, do not get caught up with trying to spend a dime while earning a nickel. Your true friends will understand when you cannot afford to do something.

Most practitioners brought before the Ethics Committee of the Bahamas Bar Association are there because of accusations of misappropriating client funds. When you hear the origin of their difficulties it always started with them “borrowing” money to pay a bill and they thought they would be able to pay the money back. If you have to borrow the money from your client account because no bank is willing to lend it to you, you will never be able to pay it back.



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Growing up my great grandmother always reminded us that ones reputation is their most precious possession. You have worked too hard to get through law school to jeopardise it doing dumbness.

Live within your means. If you can only afford a modest house or apartment, don't move into a mansion.

A dry roof over your head that you can comfortably afford is so much better than a wet cell at Fox Hill.

I was lucky because when I started at Higgs & Johnson our Accounts Department ran an Asue and several other savings schemes so it was easy for me to get into the habit of saving. Remember you will either be 65 or dead, you must financially prepare for either occurrence. Save and get life insurance.

The third point is, "Doctors bury their mistakes, lawyers can't". A former colleague told me this a few years ago and I see it as the companion quote to something another friend, who is a partner at another law firm, says to me often "we can be wrong, we just can't be negligent". Together these statements remind me of the importance of our work. Although cases and legislation can be open to interpretation, there are real life consequences to our mistakes.

You have to work diligently at all times. Yes, research is hard and LexisNexis searches can take you down rabbit holes, but you have to put in the work. Even if your supervisor does not agree with a conclusion that you arrive at, if your conclusion is supported by thorough research they will respect you. Do not make up answers!! If you don't know, ask. If you don't understand, ask. And when you get the answer listen. Do more research. Invest in your continued development.



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The fourth point is, “There is always room at the top and at the bottom”. This is wisdom from my father and it is connected to the previous point. You have to decide if you want to be a lawyer or just play dress up and look like a lawyer. Being a successful lawyer requires hard work, discipline and determination.

Nothing annoys a senior attorney more than a junior lawyer who is lazy and is just skating by. Pupillage is a year-long job interview. Work like your career depends on it, because it does. And even when you get through pupillage, remember that you are always being assessed and that you always represent your Firm, your client and yourself. Don’t ever embarrass them or yourself. You are not social media influencers, so don’t try to live like one. However, remember you are a brand and you must be very clear as to what image you are portraying. Are you a professional or are you a partier? Do not buy into the lie going around that you can behave however you want and no one can say anything to you about it. You are going to be judged by how you present yourself. Yes, you have the free will to do what you wish but you cannot control how people will react to you as a result of your behaviour, good or bad.

I am not saying you cannot enjoy your life. I do. In fact, if you were at the Road March on Saturday you may have seen my friends and myself in the semi-modest dresses but I still had a good time. You will never see my bits on the streets or me carrying on wild because I know that I represent myself and the profession wherever I go in The Bahamas.



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Fifth, law is a service industry. People come to lawyers only when they have a problem and we have to work for them remembering this. Sometimes they will be prickly, often they will be highly charged but we must always serve them with patience and a good attitude.

The next two points are lessons taken from my favourite poem, The Desiderata

“As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons”. In The Bahamas we have all heard the phrase “manners and respect will take you to the world” but many of us forget this once we become professionals and have a few letters behind our names. However, I entreat you to remember on your first day at work, the most junior personal assistant knows more than you. Everyone in your company deserves respect. Not only is it the right thing to do, but from a self-preservation standpoint you should know that at most laws firms your relationship with support staff is one of the criteria upon which your performance is assessed. Govern yourself accordingly.

My seventh point is, “If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.” The practice of law will take a toll on you mentally. Working with brilliant local and international colleagues will make you doubt your self-worth constantly. Although I am a strong proponent of constant self-evaluation and self-improvement, remember that you are enough. The fact that you are being called to the Bar of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas separates you from most people in the country.



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Some clients may prefer not to deal with you, either because you are too junior or because they don't know you. Unless they do not want to work with you because you previously gave them poor service, don't take it personally.

Conversely, when something is going well don't become arrogant. Soon enough something will come along to humble you.

Continue to work hard at your craft and you will make it through.

The eighth and final point is something that I am still trying to learn myself - "Health is wealth". The long hours and resulting terrible eating habits will take a physical and mental toll on you. Please take care of yourself. You must have a work life balance. As difficult as it may be to find it is necessary. Get into a manageable exercise and diet regime now and stick with it. Maintain your friendships as much as possible. Have hobbies. Volunteer in the community. Have something non-law related to focus on and keep precious as your own.

Remember that it is okay to not be okay. You will have days when you feel like you are drowning. Reach out to friends and family members for support. Speak to a professional if you need it. Do not suffer in silence. Only concrete and metal are expected to be strong all the time.

To end, I wish to commend to you the last paragraphs of the Desiderata:



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“Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.

And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.”

Congratulations on your upcoming graduation and Call to the Bar.

## ABOUT THE PRESENTER



Alexandra Hall is a Partner at Higgs & Johnson and Chair of the firm’s Government & Regulatory Affairs practice group and Deputy-chair of the firm’s Tax practice group. She has significant experience in local tax law, legal and regulatory issues relating to resort development and operations, gaming law and Government affairs. Alexandra is a member of the Board of Trustees of the University of The Bahamas and a former member of the National Scholarship Committee. She has been a member of the Zonta Club of New Providence since 2010 and is a former Director of that organization.