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Me and My Bertha: A Story of the Complex Relationship between a Lawyer and His Copying Machine

By Lawrence F. Morizio, YLS Chair

My term as chair of the Young Lawyers Section is winding down and my article-writing days are coming to an end. I should probably talk about how many seminars a young lawyer should attend or the top 10 ways to avoid getting grieved by your client. I'm sure you're tired of that type of chatter from me by now. Luckily for you, my thoughts right now are with my copying machine at the office. You want me to talk about fiscal responsibility? I'll try and weave it in to the discussion about the printer. It's too depressing. But it's real and you have to take steps to make things better. Last time I checked, the stimulus package didn't cater to any Connecticut law firms.

In 2005, I entered into a lease with a five-year term to have the luxury of a 55-page-per-minute behemoth of a copier/printer/scanner parked in the middle of the action in my firm's office. To protect her true identity, let's call her Bertha. We should have just put a big gold star on the side of it like the movie stars in Hollywood have on their dressing room doors. And just like the big-time actors, Bertha was getting paid

handsomely (or at least the leasing company to whom we wrote the monthly check was getting some serious consideration). I mean, I know I need this piece of...machinery for the office. But how I ever agreed to pay the same amount of money to lease it per month as I would for a luxury automobile, I don't know. The luxury car—you could drive to work. The copier—you get your hands dirty changing the toner.

These circumstances made me reflect about how I actually spend my time during the day. I have found that approximately half my time spent in my professional life is being a lawyer, doing the type of things that they train you for in law school. I never envisioned worrying about anything other than interviewing clients, going back and forth to court, and perhaps filing my claims in a timely fashion. But law school doesn't prepare you for the other half. They don't tell you about the intricacies of the copying machine—collation, printing how many pages per minute and from which tray: plain, legal letterhead, 11x17, scan to e-mail. There is not an adjunct law professor

teaching Administration of the Law Firm: Lease of Copiers 101. They should have.

Back to the copier. I called my copying machine "agent" to discuss our options in light of the fact that the scanner, which is attached to the copier, was inoperable. He mentioned that we could opt out of Bertha's lease on the condition that we enter into a new lease with an updated copier.

Did you ever play the shell game? The ball goes under the shell on the left and then you have to keep your eye on that one while the other two shells are crossing in and out to challenge your optical senses. I am sitting in this meeting trying to determine whether it is more efficient for the firm to keep Bertha for the next 18 months at the current exorbitant price and replace the scanner or rent a new copier and start all over again at a somewhat less expensive (think mid-range sedan) model with a decent scanner that could send my documents right to my e-mail. Keep your eye on the ball.

Eventually, my agent comes in with his

supervisor and provides me with several quotes. My partner and I pore over the details and agonize over which direction to take. Meanwhile, I have a brief due and realize I've spent a majority of two days trying to figure this thing out with the copier. After completing the brief, it dawned on me that given the quotes provided by the agent, it made the most sense to lease a new machine. The Bertha era would come to an end.

The next morning, I called the agent and told him we wanted to take the 2-year lease and switch out the old for the new. I would miss Bertha, but she really was a symbol of the largess that the firm really didn't need right now. When we initially leased Bertha, we had more attorneys, more staff, and probably a lot more copying going on. Now,

we would be lean and mean again in the copying department.

I got a call later in the afternoon from my agent telling me we should probably meet one more time to address particulars. Now I have truly had enough of this guy and the entire situation. I reluctantly agreed. At the meeting, he sends a shockwave through my nervous system and admits he made a mistake with the pricing (the 24-month lease price was actually the 36-month price)! After all of this number crunching, he wanted me to pay an extra year for the new lease. Remember the shell game—I'm exhausted chasing this thing around and around!!!

So in the end, Bertha is with me for another 18 months. I'll have to shop around after this lease is up and start this foray all over

again. (And if you have any suggestions as to a particular "agent," I'm listening.)

I'm tired of hearing about the economic situation we're pitted with. But I will say that it has helped me and the firm to figure out several important things about the essentials of running the business. If you are thinking of running your own law firm one day, know that it's not as simple as just plugging in the copier. Business savvy is as important as your ability to lawyer and counsel clients.

And Bertha is one example of many. I can't even begin to tell you about advertising and what I've been through with my Web site. (Check it out at www.cdm-lawfirm.com and let me know what you think.) Now that's what I call business savvy. Let me go make a copy. CL

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