

## M.C. Sungaila Offers Mother's Thoughts for The Recorder: Ten Character Lessons

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In honor of Mothers' Day, Partner M.C. Sungaila wrote an article for *The Recorder* describing 10 character lessons she learned from her mother. The article coincides with the recent release of her book, "Mother's Thoughts for the Day: 25 Years of Wisdom."

Below is an excerpt of *The Recorder* article:

After I graduated law school and throughout my career, my mother has sent me near-daily notes with inspiring quotes and words of encouragement. Many of these handwritten notes were written on stationery she created expressly for these notes: "Mother's Thought for the Day" was emblazoned across the top. In later years, after the advent of cellular phones, she sent these notes by text message rather than on paper.

The focus of these "thoughts for the day" was on courage and character, essential elements to both succeeding in a career and in life. The overarching message was that being a person of character is important. Each individual message has highlighted a different aspect of strong character. Here are 10 of them:

1. **Courage.** It takes courage to take your first deposition or argue for the first time in court. Courage, too, is required to continue to build your skill set, to develop business development skills, and put yourself "out there" over and over again to gain new clients. My mother had two pieces of advice for this: one, in her own words; the other, from Robert Kennedy. Mother: "Don't be scared. Scared will not allow you to move forward." And Kennedy: "If our times are difficult and perplexing, so are they challenging and filled with opportunity."
2. **Excellence.** Striving for excellence is important. Clients hire us to handle significant disputes and events in their personal and professional lives. They expect us to perform at a high level. And we, for our own sakes, out of a desire to aspire to the good and become the best that we can be, should never settle for "good enough." This is not easy to do. It requires discipline. It is hard work. But it is essential. After all, as my mother quoted John Ruskin: "quality is not accidental; it results from intelligent effort."
3. **Perseverance.** There are challenges at every point in your career which might make you want to change course, stop trying or simply give up. Don't. Overcoming challenges makes you stronger and helps you grow. Sometimes the first two or three approaches to a potential client don't work. Sometimes you don't make partner at your first firm, or you do not get opportunities to grow or shine at your current job. Sometimes a necessary skill like public speaking does not come easy to you. Persist. Regroup and find another way to grow and succeed. To pick yourself up off the floor after a defeat and get back into the fight, it is helpful to have goals and a vision. As my mother reminded me: "Obstacles are what you see when you take your eyes off the target."
4. **Compassion.** Being a lawyer is hard. Have some compassion for yourself, as you would a good friend. And have compassion for others, too. After all, "a friend is someone who when you've made a fool of yourself doesn't think you did a permanent job."
5. **Authenticity.** Always be yourself. Don't try to be someone else. People respond well to authentic, sincere people. As a new lawyer, you may see a senior lawyer engage in a certain

style of oral argument; do not imitate them, instead study why what they do works and consider adapting the techniques that fit with your personality. Don't measure yourself against others. The only true competition is with yourself. "Never try to be better than someone else; be the best you can be." ...

To read the full article, click [here](#).