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# IT'S OPPOSITE DAY!

## *Here's Some Terrible Advice I'd Never Actually Give You*

As any comedy fan could tell you, saying the opposite of what you mean can be really funny. It's also a good way to drive home the truth ... by elevating falsehoods into the spotlight.

In recognition of Opposite Day on Jan. 25, this is a great time to have some fun saying the opposite of what you mean. To that end, here's some legal advice I would never, ever give my clients.

### **Rely on DIY legal documents.**

Many people make a mess of legal documents by purchasing forms online and attempting to complete them on their own. One of their most common errors is failing to sign the documents correctly. Most states have specific requirements on signing and notarizing documents and on whether witnesses must be present. One probate court judge has seen the same errors in LegalZoom documents so often that he knows exactly what to look for because all the DIY documents appear the same and share the same problems. As attorneys, our work becomes cleaning up the mess.

I'd much rather help my clients get it right from the start.

### **Trust AI for legal research.**

A growing number of people place too much faith in chatbots. They enter legal queries into ChatGPT or Claude.ai without realizing that the bot may hallucinate. A client might send me an AI-driven analysis and say, "Look at this 'Smith v. Jones' case!" But when I follow up, I find either that the case doesn't

exist, or if it does exist, it doesn't stand for the precedent the chatbot claims it supports.

No doubt AI has important uses in what we do, but the bots most people use aren't very good at legal research. The key to avoiding risks is to understand what AI does. Its job is to predict the answer it thinks you want. If it can't find an answer, it will make one up to keep you engaged. If you ask for case law making a certain point, it may even create a fictional ruling just to keep you happy.

The lesson for chatbot users: Trust but verify.

### **Take advice from bots.**

A client of another attorney, a friend of mine, followed instructions from ChatGPT to include the Social Security number of her child, the beneficiary who would inherit her property, on a transfer-upon-death deed. But these instructions created a major security risk for the client's child. Linking the beneficiary's Social Security number with an address on a transfer-upon-death deed, which is a public document, is like setting off fireworks to announce, "Here, come steal this person's identity!" In fact, the beneficiary's Social Security number is *not* required on transfer-upon-death deeds. The bot conflated two separate steps. The child's Social Security number *does* come into play, but not until after the parent's death, when the document is kept private.

Although my friend counseled the client not to proceed, she insisted that ChatGPT knew better. My friend and the client soon parted ways.



Of course, sometimes a DIY approach can work well. Powers of attorney and health care directives, for example, can usually be completed on basic forms downloaded from your state's website. But even without using AI, DIY practitioners often lose out. Those who make handshake deals to lend money to a friend or relative, for example, may face losses if the loan goes bad because they have nothing in writing! The dispute is likely to devolve into a "he said, she said" argument, forcing a judge to sort it all out.

The next time you want to embrace a DIY legal solution, check with your attorney first. Whether you hire us or not, most attorneys would much rather help you get started on the right foot than be called in later to clean up. And you may save yourself a lot of time, money, and heartache.

*- Andrew M. Ayers*

# The Power of Hearing in Healing

## HOW TO MODEL CONFIDENT CARE FOR KIDS

No matter what station of life someone is in, they deserve to feel safe. Of course, physical safety is always paramount, but what about **emotional** safety? In our often busy and complex lives, ensuring our loved ones feel safe on the inside can be overlooked. This is especially true if you're a working parent, juggling obligations to your young ones and your own sense of stability and peace of mind.



Here are two quick but valuable tips for making the journey emotionally safer for you and them.

### **Not every problem requires a solution.**

We've all had days when we need to vent to someone close to us. While the recipient of our woes may immediately start suggesting ways to solve the problem, all we really want is for someone to hear and understand us. It's the same with children, who sometimes just crave the security of someone who listens to them. In these instances, saying, "Wow, you've had a tough day," may be more helpful than proclaiming, "Here's what you're doing wrong and how to fix it." Of course, adding something that elicits a smile or chuckle from a stressed child never hurts. Above all, be sure to validate their emotions. Even if their negative

situation seems minuscule by adult standards, acknowledging it may still mean the world to **them** in that moment.

### **Calm can be found in chaos.**

It's a Monday morning. Everyone is running late, the toast is burnt, a glass of orange juice has just spilled all over the kitchen table, and your little ones are talking a mile a minute. While these moments may make you want to shout on the inside, keeping a calm, gentle demeanor **outside** will help reduce tension for your kids before they head off to school and set a strong example of how to react under pressure. Frustrating situations are inevitable, but how we respond to them is our choice.

By remaining calm and showing compassion even in challenging times, we comfort our children as much as we show them how to comfort themselves.

## From Rock Bottom to Reinvention

### EDISON'S IRON WILL

Despite his rightful place in history books as one of the world's greatest minds, legendary inventor Thomas Edison was a consistent failure ... and that was a great thing.

By the time Edison died in 1931 at 84, he had experienced a life steeped in as many devastating defeats as world-changing ambitions. That he's remembered today for his scientific milestones and not his epic misfires represents the spirit of "failing forward," the concept of embracing failure as an opportunity to pursue new ideas and directions for success.

"I have not failed," Edison famously insisted. "I have just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

Here's one example of how he turned a significant misfire into an unmitigated triumph.

#### **From Iron to Insolvency**

Edison held more than 1,000 patents in his lifetime, and many of his inventions toward the end of the 1800s relied heavily on iron as a source material. When the cost of the metal began to rise, he attempted to address the problem by investing more than 10 years and \$2 million in his own iron mining operation in northern New Jersey. Unfortunately for the maverick inventor, several other iron plants launched around the same time, which caused the value of iron to drop considerably and led to severe financial losses.

#### **Cement Seals Success**

Instead of accepting defeat when his iron operation went under, Edison turned his attention to another critical material: cement. While running his iron mine, he regularly sold waste sand to cement makers for additional revenue. Seeing an opportunity to expand further into this market, he launched the Edison Portland Cement Company, repurposing

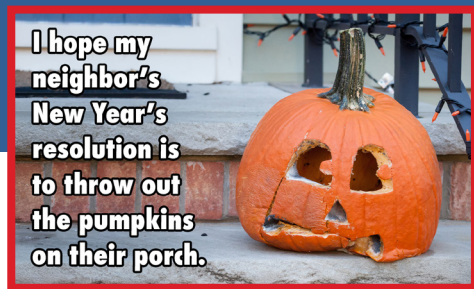


equipment and technology he had used for iron mining. The venture was a huge success, allowing Edison to pay off his massive debts and become one of the leading forces behind the use of cement in American infrastructure.

While the catastrophic failure of his iron mining endeavor would have crushed most entrepreneurs, Edison thrived by pivoting to new ventures. He never gave up. His inventions proved his brilliance, but his fearlessness in the face of failure demonstrated his resilience.



# TAKE A *BREAK*



## SLOW COOKER BIRRIA TACOS

### Ingredients

- 3 dried guajillo chiles
- 2 dried ancho chiles
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves
- 1 (14.5-oz) can diced tomatoes
- 3 lbs beef chuck roast
- 2 cups beef broth
- 2 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp dried oregano
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tsp salt
- Pepper, to taste
- Corn tortillas
- Fresh cilantro and diced onion for garnish

### Directions

1. Soak dried chiles in hot water for 15 minutes.
2. Process chiles, onion, garlic, and tomatoes in a blender until smooth.
3. Place beef in a slow cooker and pour the chili mixture over it.
4. Add beef broth, vinegar, oregano, cumin, bay leaves, salt, and pepper.
5. Cook on low for 8–10 hours or until the beef is tender.
6. Shred the beef using forks, then mix back into the sauce.
7. Fry tortillas in oil until crispy, then assemble tacos as desired.

Inspired by SimpleWhisk.com

# Fast-Food Folly

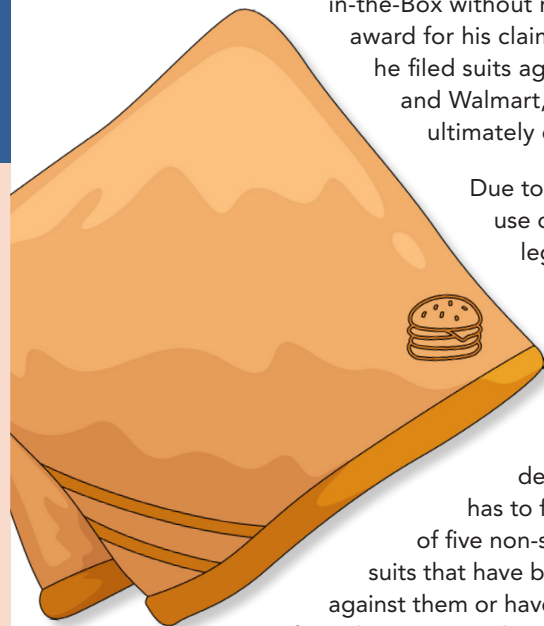
## A Napkin Sparks a Legal Storm

There are several ways to become a millionaire in this country, but suing a fast-food chain over a napkin isn't one of them.

In 2014, a McDonald's restaurant in Pacoima, California, became the focus of a national discussion on how the legal system addressed frivolous lawsuits. It all started with a customer named Webster Lucas, who complained to the manager when he discovered that he had been given only one napkin with his meal. Lucas claimed the manager had "developed a nasty attitude and mumbled a few words" before cursing at him. He also alleged that the manager's behavior was racially motivated.

The verbal altercation prompted Lucas to file a **\$1.5 million** suit against the McDonald's Corporation and the Pacoima store's manager and general manager for (as reported by NBC News at the time) mental anguish, emotional distress, and discrimination. Despite being offered free food from the corporation to make things right, Lucas moved forward with his litigation.

Interestingly, this wasn't the first time Lucas had sued a major restaurant for an unsatisfactory experience. According to court documents obtained by NBC News, he had previously filed two separate suits against Jack-in-the-Box without receiving an award for his claims. Additionally, he filed suits against Denny's and Walmart, which were ultimately dismissed.



Due to his habitual use of the California legal system, Lucas became known as a "vexatious litigant." To earn this dubious designation, one has to file a minimum of five non-small claims suits that have been settled against them or have been pending for at least 24 months without a hearing or trial. Additionally, an individual can be deemed a "vexatious litigant" by repeatedly filing or relitigating meritless cases.

Despite online reports to the contrary, court documents confirm that Lucas' case against McDonald's was dismissed by the end of 2014. Unsurprisingly, little has been heard of him in the California legal system since.



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# INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1

Opposite Day Advice: Legal Guidance You'd Best Ignore

2

Parenting to Empower Emotional Calm in Kids  
Cement Saves a Scientific Legend

3

Slow Cooker Birria Tacos  
A Laughable McLawsuit Misfire

4

The Legal Minds Behind Moon Missions

## COSMIC COUNSEL

### Who Makes the Rules in Space?

The phrase "space lawyer" may conjure images of an intergalactic courtroom setting in a "Star Trek" film, but the term and profession are rooted in reality here on Earth.

Simply put, space lawyers are legal professionals specializing in international law and drafting agreements between countries regarding their activities throughout our galaxy. Instead of brokering peace treaties between humans and Klingons, these attorneys work to establish policies that outline rules and obligations nations must follow when conducting themselves beyond our clouds.

For example, treaties negotiated by space lawyers were instrumental in getting the Soviet Union to spend millions to clean up radioactive debris deposited over northern Canada by its Cosmos 954 satellite in the late 1970s. Utilizing Article 7 of the Outer

Space Treaty (via the 1972 Space Liability Convention), the Canadian government argued that the Soviet Union was on the hook to cover the majority of the cost of Operation Morning Light, an extensive cleanup operation by the U.S. and Canada



to remove nearly 50,000 square miles of hazardous material dropped from space.

Thanks to space lawyers, no nation can claim ownership of Earth (or any other planet), the moon, or any other entity discovered in the galaxy. However, recent debates have raised an intriguing question: Who would own the **resources** derived from the moon or another planet? If Russia were to one day discover a life-saving nutrient on the moon's surface, would it have the right to claim exclusive ownership of this medical marvel? Would this discovery need to be shared with other nations involved in space-related treaties?

While it may take years (or the invention of a good time-traveling warp drive) for us to resolve these questions, it's clear we need space lawyers to tackle these and other questions in a legal frontier that no Earth-bound lawyer has pondered before!