

the bottom line by Steve Churm

Simple and sound advice

In the business of law, there's no substitute for being prepared. Just ask veteran Santa Ana trial attorney Daniel Callahan.

In this upside-down economy, where uncertainty is often the order of the business day, going back to basics to find stability and growth is a strategy many executives and business owners have adopted. The expression I hear more and more from those in corner offices is, "Let's get back to blocking and tackling."

Truth is, there is no substitute for quality products and superior service. Build a great product with value for the consumer and offer unwavering support and service, and you have an equation for success in any economic climate. If a company delivers on both counts, it can be competitive – if not an industry leader. It's basic, like blocking and tackling in football. Many firms in all industries pay lip service to the importance of those two tenets but never follow through. When that happens, the outcome is not pretty.

This explains, in large part, the success of attorney Daniel Callahan, one of Orange County's top business litigators. Since he began practicing law in this county some 30 years ago, Callahan has done the little things that have delivered big results. By sticking to the basics, he's amassed an impressive resume: He was twice named top trial lawyer of the year in Orange County and once in California; he's been named one of the top 100 trial lawyers in the U.S.; he received the highest jury verdict in Orange County history at \$934 million; and he won the highest personal-injury settlement ever, at \$50 million, against the city of Dana Point.

His secret to success in one of the most competitive and crowded professions: preparation.

"It comes down to really one thing," he said recently in the quiet of his high-rise Santa Ana office overlooking the 55

Freeway. "You have to be prepared. See those binders? I will read every one of them because if I don't, I won't be ready. This industry has changed significantly. But what hasn't is the need to be ready for trial."

Within arm's reach of Callahan was a metal cart with three rows of thick black notebooks containing transcripts from depositions for an upcoming case. "To be honest, I don't like the prep work. But you have to do it. It's the part of the craft that hasn't changed."

What has evolved in today's courtroom is leveraging the speed, efficiency and impact of technology to tell a story, particularly in front of a jury. The use of PowerPoint, video and even the Web are visually influential tools that Callahan and his firm of 30 attorneys have been employing to try cases for several years.

"If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a video done right is worth a million," Callahan said.

But part of the challenge for trial lawyers today is the higher expectation brought on by fictional TV and movie accounts about law and science when it comes to solving crimes and settling cases.

"Jurors have smartphones, iPads and access to all manner of technology, and their expectation is that we have it, too, and can use it, just like our counterparts on TV, to do our job."

When it works, Callahan said, it can be a game changer. But if a device malfunctions or the presentation fails to load, a case can be won or lost at that moment.

"It's why I always take a consultant to run my equipment in the courtroom."

That's blocking and tackling at its best.

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–Daniel Callahan

