

LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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What's in a Name?

When it comes to baby names, everyone seems to have an opinion, and most folks don't hesitate to share it.



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I have several friends who recently had children and had to deal with friends and family offering up their own ideas for names or commenting on the pros and cons of names being considered. My family is no different.

As the youngest of five, even my siblings weighed in on what my name would be. My parents had given my brothers and sister names rooted in our family history. My oldest brother was named after my father, my sister after my mother and grandmother, and my middle brothers after my grandfathers. By the time I came along, we were running out of branches and name options. My parents settled on using the middle names of my two great grandfathers: William Oliver Stutes and Camille Pierre Melancon. So I became Oliver Pierre Yandle.

Another tradition in my family is using nicknames. Rather than go with the obvious ("Ollie"), my parents got really creative and decided to use my initials — O-P-Y. But since it was the only name I was ever called by, I kept using the nickname through school.

Names matter, especially when it comes to making first impressions. They can convey information, create mental images, and evoke emotions in a short-hand way.

Entering college, I decided I needed to present a more professional appearance and started using my full name with my nickname in quotes, to ease the transition. In my senior year, I ran for President of an international service organization. During the campaign, a number of delegates asked why the members would want to be led by someone named "Opy." My initial reaction was, "Really? You're not going to vote for me because of my name?" Instead, I said I was proud of my name, even if I didn't have a choice in the matter. "And shouldn't my ideas, vision and experience determine whether you vote for me?" That certainly helped to change the conversation.

By the time I graduated from college, I had dropped "Opy" altogether. After all, I was a 22 year old moving to Washington, DC, for a professional job in public policy. I needed to be taken seriously.

I got a great job as a legislative analyst for a transportation association, whose members included the senior executives of huge companies like GM, Exxon and Firestone. During my orientation, my boss asked if I had any nicknames. I thought for a while, and, wanting to establish comradery with my superiors, shared the nickname. Several weeks later, I was asked to make a presentation before

a dozen big wigs from the auto and oil industries. I had prepared for weeks and was excited about the chance to make an impression on this group. My boss opened the meeting with introductions: "And, finally, I'd like you to welcome our newest staff member, Legislative Analyst Opy Yandle." My attempt at a new brand for myself was off to a rough start.

MORE THAN WORDS

Names matter, especially when it comes to making first impressions. They can convey information, create mental images, and evoke emotions in a short-hand way. But a name is only part of the brand picture. The feelings, perceptions and connections that one has with a product, service or organization are what truly create a brand image. Dropping my nickname hasn't changed who I am as a person, but it has enabled me to present a more professional appearance.

ALA has had its own challenges with its name. We share our acronym with a host of other organizations, including the American Lung Association, American Lighting Association and the Association for Laboratory Automation, among others. In fact, a few years ago, we had our Chapter Leadership Institute at the same hotel the American Library Association was having an event. As our group was preparing to board buses for an offsite event, some of our members boarded a bus labeled "ALA" and ended up at a big party for librarians.

Spelling out the acronym certainly helps to clarify who we are, but "Association of Legal Administrators," can limit our ability to reach certain audiences. To functional specialists, branch office managers and law department executives, the name may suggest that the organization is not open to them. To younger generations and the non-U.S. legal community, the term "administrator" suggests a more administrative and clerical role, rather than the executive, decision-making role our members play in leading their firms and law departments.

To reach new audiences critical to our future success and to distinguish our organization as the leader in the business of law, we need to make a stronger and more impactful first impression. And that begins with a brand that builds on all of the advantages that have been the foundation of ALA, but also one that is fresh, modern, engaging, smart, forward-looking and progressive.

I hope you will join us on July 24 at this year's Chapter Leadership Institute in Grand Rapids (or via webcast) as we launch our new brand. It will be a great vantage point for you to see the future of our organization and the profession we represent.

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